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Transcript to the video documentary:

FALSE FLAGS:
The Secret History Of
Al-Qaeda

By: James Corbett

<https://www.corbettreport.com/alqaeda/>

False Flags: The Secret History of Al Qaeda

By James Corbett - 09/11/2021 - <https://www.corbettreport.com/alqaeda/>

We all know the story of bin Laden and Al Qaeda, the story that was repeated *ad nauseam* in the days, weeks and months after the catastrophic, catalyzing events of 9/11. So often was that story repeated that the hypnotized public forgot that it was, at base, just that: a story. . . .

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Part One: Origin Story

TRANSCRIPT

"Does the Brotherhood exist?"

"That, Winston, you will never know."

*George Orwell
Nineteen Eighty-Four*

INTRODUCTION

Kandahar Province, Afghanistan. May 1998.

John Miller, an ABC News correspondent who would go on to become the FBI's chief spokesman, ends an [11-day journey](#) through the wilds of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The first thing he notices is the rumbling of the generators providing the camp with power and the smell of gasoline. The second thing he notices is a hail of bullets. Bin Laden's convoy is arriving.

Osama bin Laden is flanked by seven bodyguards, who—as Miller immediately recognizes—are simply there to put on a show. "Their eyes darted in every direction for any attacker," he [later recounted](#). "This was either merely theatrical or entirely pointless, because with hundreds of rounds being fired into the air, it would have been impossible to pinpoint an assassin."

Following the security detail into the hut, there Miller became one of the handful of Western journalists to interview the elusive Osama bin Laden.

OSAMA BIN LADEN (VIA INTERPRETER): We believe that the biggest thieves in the world are Americans and the biggest terrorists on earth are the Americans. The only way for us to fend off these assaults is by using similar means. We do not differentiate between those dressed in military uniforms and civilians; they're all targets in this *fatwa*.

SOURCE: [Osama bin Laden: "The Most Dangerous Man You've Never Heard Of" - June 10, 1998 - ABC News Nightline](#)

Miller has traveled halfway around the world to interview bin Laden, the reclusive terrorist leader who has just issued a religious *fatwa* requiring Muslims to kill Americans. But this interview, too, is just for show. Forced to

submit his questions in writing ahead of time, Miller is informed that the answers will not be translated for him. There will be no follow-up questions.

It is spectacle. Theater and little else. As such, it is a fitting introduction to the man who would become the bogeyman of the 21st century. The interview was followed in short order by a more explosive drama.

PETER BERGEN: What are your future plans?

OSAMA BIN LADEN: You'll see them and hear about them in the media . . . God willing.

SOURCE: [*Exclusive Osama bin Laden - First Ever TV Interview*](#)

FALSE FLAGS: THE SECRET HISTORY OF AL QAEDA

PART ONE: ORIGIN STORY

Around the world, a frightened and confused public received their introduction to the age of terror on the morning of September 11, 2001, through the media. It was there, in the flickering images of their TV screens, that the masses began to learn about the world of Islamic terrorism and of the cave-dwelling Saudi exile in Afghanistan who was bringing that terror to their doorstep.

ANCHOR: Tell us a bit about Osama bin Laden—what sort of resources in manpower and money he's got and what he's trying to achieve.

SOURCE: [*September 11, 2001 - 5:28pm EDT \(10:28pm BST\)*](#)

RAY SUAREZ: What is Osama bin Laden? Is he a politician? Is he a warrior? Is he a preacher? A little of all?

SCHEUER: A little of all, I think, sir. He's a . . .

SOURCE: [*Who Speaks For Islam?*](#)

HODA KOTB: . . . millionaire Saudi businessman believed to be living in exile in Afghanistan.

SOURCE: [*September 11, 2001 - 5:20-5:30pm EDT on WRC*](#)

REPORTER: He controls and finances Al Qaeda, an umbrella network of Islamic militants.

SOURCE: [*September 11, 2001 - 6:30-6:40pm EDT \(11:30-11:40pm BST\) on BBC*](#)

SCHEUER: . . . he is a very soft-spoken man . . .

SOURCE: [*Who Speaks For Islam?*](#)

SIMON REEVE: . . . a man who is prepared to use overwhelming force in pursuit of his objectives.

SOURCE: [*September 13, 2001 - 6:21am EDT on CNN*](#)

ANCHOR: He is the face that has been put on this by almost everyone.

SOURCE: [*September 15, 2001 - 8:20-8:30am EDT on WTTG*](#)

SCHEUER: . . . a man of eloquence . . .

SOURCE: [*Who Speaks For Islam?*](#)

KOTB: He has declared all US citizens legitimate targets of attack.

SOURCE: [*September 11, 2001 - 5:25pm EDT on WRC*](#)

JOHN SIMPSON: When I was in Afghanistan just a couple of days ago, I heard that he had . . .

SOURCE: [*September 11, 2001 - 5:20-5:30pm EDT \(10:20-10:30pm BST\) on BBC*](#)

DAN RATHER: . . . operations in at least 55 countries . . .

SOURCE: [*CBS Evening News - 2001-09-13*](#)

KOTB: Including last year's bombing of the *USS Cole* in Yemen . . .

SOURCE: [*September 11, 2001 - 5:25pm EDT on WRC*](#)

REPORTER: . . . the mastermind behind the bombings of two US embassies in Africa . . .

SOURCE: [*September 16, 2001 - 11:30-11:40pm EDT on CNN*](#)

REPORTER: . . . and the last attack on the World Trade Center eight years ago.

SOURCE: [*September 11, 2001 - 6:20-6:30pm EDT \(11:20-11:30pm BST\) on BBC*](#)

SCHEUER: Bernard Lewis has called him almost a poetic speaker of Arabic.

SOURCE: [*Who Speaks For Islam?*](#)

KATIE COURIC: Meanwhile, Osama bin Laden is a name that we have been hearing all day long as an individual who may—and we emphasize *may*—be responsible for these terrorist acts. It is a name we have heard before as well . . .

SOURCE: [*NBC News 9-11-2001 Live Coverage 1:00pm EDT - 6:30pm EDT*](#)

We all know the story of bin Laden and Al Qaeda, the story that was repeated *ad nauseam* in the days, weeks and months after the catastrophic, catalyzing events of 9/11. So often was that story repeated that the hypnotized public forgot that it was, at base, just that: a story.

In the ahistorical fable of TV sound bites, terrorism is a modern invention—created out of whole cloth by Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda. And, at the same time, Islamic fundamentalism is a force of nature, something that has always existed in the Middle East—the product, perhaps, of some sandstorm on the Arabian peninsula in the distant past.

But this is a lie. In truth, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the modern era and the rise of terrorism as a political tool cannot be understood without confronting some very well-documented but long-repressed history.

Ever since the mid-18th century—when the British East India Company gained dominion over the Indian subcontinent—the history of Islam as a political and cultural force has been intimately tied to the fortunes of Empire and the aims of the Western powers. The British Empire, in particular, did much to shape the map of the modern-day Middle East and to influence the course of its religious and political forces.

This influence can be seen throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.

Britain's gradual takeover of the Indian subcontinent led to the British Empire becoming, in the [estimation of Winston Churchill](#), "[T]he greatest Mohammedan power in the world."

The 19th-century "Great Game" between Victorian England and Tsarist Russia for control of Central Asia saw the British propping up unpopular Islamic rulers throughout the region as a buffer between Russia and the "crown jewel" of the British Empire, India.

Britain's desire to maintain its access to India led to the British conquest of Egypt in 1882, resulting in 40 years of British rule and a military presence in the country that was not removed until the Suez Crisis of 1956.

From Khartoum to Constantinople, Jerusalem to Jakarta, no part of the Muslim world could escape the influence of the British crown. Sometimes that influence was used to strengthen the rule of Islamic hardliners. Sometimes, as with the Mahdist rebellion in Sudan, that influence was used to put down Islamic uprisings. But in each case, the British Empire's goal was clear: to use whatever means at its disposal to undermine movements and governments unfavourable to its rule and to install and encourage those forces that were willing to cooperate with the crown.

This was evident in India, where George Francis Hamilton, secretary of state for India, [wrote in 1886](#) of the British strategy of using Muslim and Hindu divisions in the country to their advantage along the lines of the old Roman imperial strategy of divide and rule:

I think the real danger to our rule, not now, but say 50 years hence is the gradual adoption and extension of Western ideas of agitation organisation and if we could break educated Indians into two sections holding widely different views, we should, by such a division, strengthen our position against the subtle and continuous attack which the spread of education must make upon our system of government. We should so plan educational text-books that the differences between community and community are further strengthened.

But perhaps no clearer example of the British Empire's role in shaping the modern Muslim world can be found than the story of the ascendance of the House of Saud and the formation of the modern-day Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Once again, British fingerprints can be found on every aspect of the story.

When Britain began contemplating a shift from its centuries-long policy of supporting the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East, it was [Captain William Shakespear](#)—a British civil servant and explorer—who made the first official contact with Ibn Saud, the progenitor of the Saudi dynasty who would go on to found the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In addition to [taking the first photographs](#) of the future Saudi king, Shakespear became Ibn Saud's friend and military advisor, helping to steer the rising Arab leader away from alliance with the Ottomans and into [a treaty with the British](#). Shakespear died on the battlefield at Jarab in 1915, where the British-backed Ibn Saud was battling his Turkish-backed rival, Ibn Rashid.

After Shakespear's death, another British agent, Colonel Thomas Edward Lawrence, gained international fame as "Lawrence of Arabia" for his role in the Arab Revolt against Ottoman rule in the Middle East. Although his own self-serving autobiography and the Hollywoodization of his story cemented in the popular imagination the idea that Lawrence was motivated solely by his concern for the Arabs and their independence . . .

PETER O'TOOLE (AS T. E. LAWRENCE): We do not work this thing for Faisal.

ANTHONY QUINN (AS AUDA ABU TAYI): No? For the English then?

LAWRENCE: For the Arabs.

TAYI: The Arabs?

SOURCE: [LAWRENCE OF ARABIA](#)

. . . the documented history of Lawrence's actions and motivations tells a very different story. A [memo on "The Politics of Mecca"](#) penned by Lawrence for his intelligence handlers in 1916, reveals a more duplicitous British calculus for supporting certain factions of the Arab Revolt:

The Arabs are even less stable than the Turks. If properly handled they would remain in a state of political mosaic, a tissue of small jealous principalities, incapable of cohesion, and yet always ready to combine against an outside force. The alternative to this seems to be control and colonization by a European power other than ourselves, which would inevitably come into conflict with the interests we already possess in the Near East.

Later, in a report on the "[Reconstruction of Arabia](#)" Lawrence penned for the British Cabinet at the end of the war, he was even more explicit about the cynical divide-and-rule tactics at play in British support for the Arab Revolt: "When war broke out an urgent need to divide Islam was added, and we became reconciled to seek for allies rather than subjects. [. . .] We hoped by the creation of a ring of client states, themselves insisting on our patronage, to turn the present and future flank of any foreign power with designs on the three rivers."

ALEC GUINNESS (AS PRINCE FAISAL): Lawrence! . . . Or is it Major Lawrence?

LAWRENCE: Sir!

FAISAL: Ah. Well, General, I will leave you. Major Lawrence doubtless has reports to make. About my people. And their weakness. And the need to keep them weak . . . in the British interest.

SOURCE: [LAWRENCE OF ARABIA](#)

Lawrence and the military and diplomatic personnel of the British Empire were indeed busy in the wake of WWI. In many ways, the aftermath of the war represented the zenith of that empire, and the culmination of centuries of British manipulation in the Middle East. Driven by a mixture of political necessity and imperial hubris, the imperial planners had entered into secret agreements that redrew the map of the Middle East and once again affirmed the centuries-old accusation that [Perfidious Albion](#) was not to be trusted.

In 1916, the British and French entered into a pact to divide up the territory of the Ottoman Empire between themselves should they win the war. This treaty—known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement after the diplomats who negotiated the document—was a direct negation of the web of promises that the British had already made on the land, including the [territorial promises they had made to Ali Ibn Husain](#), the Sherif of Mecca who led the Arab Revolt against the Turks, the [Treaty of Darin](#) that had promised Ibn Saud British protection for his conquests in the Arabian Peninsula in return for his support in the war, and the Balfour Declaration promising the Zionists a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Although the [revelation of the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement by the Bolsheviks](#) in 1917 proved a considerable embarrassment for the British and French, it did little to hinder their plans. The agreement provided a basis for

the ultimate partitioning of the Ottoman Empire after the war, and the national borders that it helped to create have gone on to [shape a century of strife](#) and political conflict in the region.

But it was not enough merely to draw the lines on the maps that would define the post-war Middle East, the British had to shape the development of the region in their own interest, creating entire nations in the process. In the Arabian Peninsula, they came to pin their hopes on Ibn Saud, whose sole focus on the conquest of Arabia, they calculated, would counteract the rise of a broader Pan-Islamic movement that could challenge Britain's supremacy in the region. As historian Mark Curtis writes in his book, [Secret Affairs: Britain's Collusion with Radical Islam](#):

The British government of India had feared British sponsorship of an Arab caliph who would lead the entire Muslim world, and the effects this might have on Muslims in India, and had therefore favoured Ibn Saud, whose pretensions were limited to Arabia.

The subsidy from the British upon which Ibn Saud relied in his quest to unite the peninsula, which stood at £5,000 a month at the end of the war, was raised to £100,000 a year in 1922 by then-Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill. Churchill recognized that Saud's fighters—the "Ikhwan," or brotherhood of hardliners and adherents to the strict Wahabbi sect of Islam—were "austere, intolerant, well-armed and bloodthirsty" and "hold it as an article of duty, as well as of faith, to kill all who do not share their opinions and to make slaves of their wives and children." So why, then, did the British support Saud and his men? "My admiration for him [Ibn Saud] was deep," Churchill [later confessed](#), "because of his unfailing loyalty to us."

That loyalty paid off well. The British were the first to formally recognize Ibn Saud's sovereignty over his newly conquered territory on the peninsula, and in return Ibn Saud signed [a treaty](#) agreeing to stop his forces from attacking Britain's neighbouring protectorates. In 1932, Ibn Saud became King Saud of the newly-formed "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." But even the nation's new name was British. It was [George Rendel](#), head of the British Foreign Office's Eastern Department, who suggested it.

The British played similar games throughout the region, arming, funding and encouraging those who would work with them—including violent Islamic radicals—and undermining any potential challengers to British dominance.

In Palestine, the British pardoned Amin al-Husseini—who had been sentenced to 10 years in prison for his involvement in the 1920 Jerusalem riots—and appointed him the Grand Mufti of Palestine (a title [invented by the British](#)) on condition that he [cooperate with the British authorities](#).

In Egypt, which became a British protectorate after WWI, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood—an Islamist mass movement founded by Hassan al-Banna—was at times an explicit threat to the British military presence in the country. Nevertheless, its position as an alternative to both secular nationalism and communism—which Britain regarded as growing threats to its influence in the region—meant that the British were prepared to work with the Brotherhood against their common enemies, even [covertly financing the group](#) in 1942.

In Iraq, the British, concerned at unrest in their [Mesopotamian mandate](#), aided Prince Faisal in becoming Faisal I, King of Iraq. Faisal—[recommended by T. E. Lawrence, guided \(at his own request\) by British advisors and traveling at British expense](#)—won a British-backed plebiscite to become the Iraqi king in 1921.

The extent of British influence over the region during the post-war period was, in retrospect, staggering. But the number of machinations, manipulations and shifting alliances that were required to keep this system of mandates, protectorates and puppet governments going was a sign that the British were *not* all-powerful. On the contrary. Their influence, and indeed their empire itself, was waning, soon to be replaced by the new rising world superpower, the United States.

The US did not even wait until the end of the Second World War and the dawn of Pax Americana to begin its own "diplomacy" with the Muslims in the region.

NEWSREADER: An American destroyer comes alongside a cruiser at Great Bitter Lake on the Suez Canal in Egypt. It brings Ibn Saud, king of the five million people of Saudi Arabia, to a conference with President Roosevelt, stopping off here on his return from the Crimea Conference. The destroyer has been decked out with red carpets for the monarch. This 800-mile trip marks the first time that King Ibn Saud has ever left his native land.

SOURCE: [*Roosevelt Meets Saud*](#)

President Franklin Roosevelt's [meeting](#) with King Ibn Saud aboard the *USS Quincy* on Egypt's Great Bitter Lake in February 1945 was no ordinary exchange of diplomatic pleasantries. King Saud's first foreign trip involved a number of [unusual requests and special arrangements](#). The Saudis insisted on bringing a contingent of 48 men even though the Americans had said they could accommodate only 10. They insisted on sleeping in tents pitched on the ship's deck rather than in the cabins provided. They insisted on bringing their own sheep, as the king believed that good Muslims eat only freshly slaughtered animals.

But, irregularities aside, the meeting was momentous.

Firstly, it demonstrated the importance of the Saudi-US relationship at a time when much of the world knew little and cared less about the happenings on the Arabian peninsula.

Secondly, it established the terms of that relationship: namely, a US guarantee of military defense of Saudi Arabia (including Roosevelt's [promise](#) to "do nothing to assist the Jews against the Arabs") in return for Saudi concessions, including allowance for US airfields and flyover routes across the kingdom and access to Dharhan, where the California Arabian Standard Oil Corporation (which later became Aramco) had drilled the [first commercially viable oil well](#) in the country just seven years earlier.

And thirdly, it signaled the dawn of a new era. No longer was the British Empire the primary foreign power driving events in the region. From now on, one of the key foreign policy considerations of the Muslim world was the US and its enormous military and financial resources.

This changeover in world order was not instantaneous. For some time after the end of WWII, the US and British collaborated on operations that furthered their mutual interests in the region. These "interests" included opposing the rising threat of secular nationalist governments that—unlike the House of Saud and other Western-backed monarchies in the Middle East—were less pliable to bribes and more interested in nationalizing their countries' resources.

In March 1951, the Iranian parliament voted to nationalize the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company—the British oil giant that struck oil near the Persian Gulf in 1908—and [offered the premiership of the government to Mohammed Mossadegh](#), an outspoken secular nationalist. Immediately after taking office, Mossadegh effected the nationalization, [stating](#):

Our long years of negotiations with foreign countries [. . .] have yielded no results this far. With the oil revenues we could meet our entire budget and combat poverty, disease, and backwardness among our people. Another important consideration is that by the elimination of the power of the British company, we would also eliminate corruption and intrigue, by means of which the internal affairs of our country have been influenced. Once this tutelage has ceased, Iran will have achieved its economic and political independence.

The nationalization put Tehran on a collision course with London. But Britain knew that a military intervention was not possible without American approval and, despite harsh economic sanctions on the country and a boycott of the newly nationalized oil industry that was joined by much of the Western world, they could not overthrow the Iranian government themselves. Instead, they had to [turn to the US](#).

Although the Truman administration was initially hesitant to become involved, that changed with the election of Dwight D. Eisenhower and the installation of the Dulles brothers, Allen and John Foster, as Director of Central Intelligence and Secretary of State respectively. By June of 1953, the CIA was already adapting the British coup proposal into [their own covert operation](#), dubbed Operation TPAJAX.

An open secret in the world of intelligence, the CIA/MI6 role in the overthrow of Mossadegh was officially denied by the US government for over half a century and is [still unacknowledged by the British government](#) to this day. Nevertheless, the CIA's own [internal history of the operation](#), first revealed to the public in the year 2000, confirms the extent of the American and British role in the coup.

They [convinced the Shah of Iran to agree to the plan](#). They [handpicked General Fazlollah Zahedi](#) as Mossadegh's successor. They rolled out a [propaganda campaign](#) to portray Mossadegh—a devout adherent to democratic nationalism who rigorously excluded the nation's communist party from his government—as a communist sympathizer who would steer Iran into the arms of the Soviets; they spent hundreds of thousands of dollars [bribing journalists, clerics, and even Iranian parliament members](#) themselves to go along with the plot; and they used a network of agents and suitcases full of money to incite riots and protests across the country.

In the end, the operation was a success. Mossadegh was driven from power, General Zahedi took his place, the Western-backed Shah ruled the country with the iron fist of his feared [secret police](#) for the next 25 years, and a new agreement on sales of Iranian oil was reached. This time, though, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, now rebranded as British Petroleum, would not have a monopoly on the country's lucrative oil reserves; an [international consortium](#) was put together to share in the profits, with American companies Chevron and Standard Oil cut into the deal.

But the eclipse of the old British Empire by the new American superpower became most obvious in Egypt during the Suez Crisis of 1956.

Lying on the key spice and trade routes linking Europe and Asia, the importance of Egypt to the British Empire went back centuries. It was the British Navy under Nelson and the British Army under General Ralph Abercromby that drove Napoleon out of the country during the French campaign there at the turn of the 19th century. But it was the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 that cemented Egypt's geopolitical importance for the British Empire.

The Suez Canal—linking the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea and drastically reducing sailing distances from Asia to Europe—was technically the property of the Egyptians, but the project had been spearheaded by the French, and the concessionary company that operated the canal had been largely financed by French shareholders. An economic crisis in 1875, however, forced the Egyptian governor to sell his own shares to the British. As Parliament was not in session at the time of the sale, British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli had to turn to his close personal friend, [Lionel de Rothschild](#), for the £4,000,000 required to purchase the shares. After the British conquest of Egypt in 1882, an [international agreement](#) was signed declaring the canal a neutral zone under the protection of the British, whose troops were now installed in the country.

This precarious balance of power lasted in various permutations for over 70 years, first under Britain's so-called "[Veiled Protectorate](#)" of Egypt in the decades leading up to WWI, then in a formal British occupation of the country during WWI and its aftermath, and then under Britain's [Unilateral Declaration of Egyptian independence](#) in 1922, which stipulated that the British would retain power over Egypt's defence and foreign policy. Britain's

de facto control over the country was one of the grievances that gave rise to the Free Officers Movement, a cadre of Egyptian nationalists in the ranks of the Egyptian Armed Forces who toppled King Farouk and took over the government in the Egyptian Revolution of 1952.

One of the movement's leaders, Gamal Abdel Nasser Hussein, became President of Egypt in 1954 and began to implement a series of nationalist, anti-imperialist measures that, like Mossadegh, put him at odds with the British forces in his country. These measures culminated with Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal on July 26, 1956.

The [Suez Crisis](#) led to a joint [British-French-Israeli invasion of the country](#), but in this case, the US under Eisenhower declined to back the invasion. Instead, Eisenhower—still believing that diplomacy and pressure could turn Nasser from the Soviet orbit and help America leverage its influence over the Arab world—joined the USSR in forcing an end to the invasion.

The crisis marked a definitive turning point. The age of the British Empire were over. The age of the American superpower had begun. From now on, American military and financial power would be the determining factor in the Muslim world—and indeed the world in general.

But the Americans had learned well from their British predecessors. The same tactics of strategic and shifting alliances, double dealings and covert operations that the British had used to maintain their influence for centuries would now be employed by the Americans to leverage their own power.

They applied these lessons in Iran, where they supported the Shah's brutal dictatorship even as they maintained a [secret communication channel](#) with exiled religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini.

They applied these lessons in Indonesia, where the US at various times [supported the Islamic factions](#) in their rebellion against the Sukarno government, the Sukarno government itself, and, eventually, Suharto, who slaughtered over half a million people on his [US-backed rise to power](#).

They applied these lessons in the Sinai Peninsula, where, as [declassified documents](#) now show, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger helped engineer the Yom Kippur War so that "the Arabs would conclude the only way to peace was through us" and the Israelis would conclude that "they had to depend on us to win and couldn't win if we were too recalcitrant."

And they applied these lessons in Saudi Arabia, where Treasury Secretary William Simon helped enshrine the US dollar's central role in global geopolitics and saved the US from the 1973 oil crisis by negotiating [the petrodollar system](#), a covert deal with the House of Saud to purchase Saudi oil and sell them weapons and equipment in return for a Saudi pledge to finance American debt by investing their oil revenue in US Treasuries.

This era of American-led intrigue and double-dealing would culminate in one of the most important years for the Muslim world in the modern era: 1979.

That was the year of the Iranian revolution, when the American and British overthrow of Mossadegh in 1953 would come home to roost in the overthrow of the Western-backed Shah and the first major victory for the forces of political Islam in the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

That was the year of the [seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca](#), when Islamic hardliners shocked the Muslim world by storming the holiest mosque in Islam and, during a dramatic two-week standoff, calling for the overthrow of the House of Saud and the end of its attempts at westernization.

That was the year Egyptian President Anwar Sadat [signed a peace treaty with Israel](#), normalizing relations between the two countries and leading to [Sadat's assassination](#) by members of Egyptian Islamic Jihad just two years later.

And that was also the year that developments in Afghanistan put in motion a chain of events that would lead to the creation of the group we now know as "Al Qaeda."

On Christmas Eve 1979, Soviet troops began an invasion of Afghanistan. Initially, this was portrayed to the American public as a spontaneous act of aggression, the opening salvo in a new campaign by the Russians to conquer the region and upset the world order.

JIMMY CARTER: Fifty thousand heavily armed Soviet troops have crossed the border and are now dispersed throughout Afghanistan, attempting to conquer the fiercely independent Muslim people of that country.

[. . .]

If the Soviets are encouraged in this invasion by eventual success, and if they maintain their dominance over Afghanistan and then extend their control to adjacent countries, the stable, strategic, and peaceful balance of the entire world will be changed.

SOURCE: [January 4, 1980: Speech on Afghanistan](#)

As historians with access to USSR document archives [now know](#), the Soviet leadership was extremely reluctant to become entangled in Afghanistan. Well aware of the country's reputation as a "[graveyard of empires](#)," Soviet politicians and military leaders knew that any attempt to bring Afghanistan under military and political control would be extremely difficult.

Instead, the invasion was the end result of a series of events that threatened to plunge Afghanistan and the surrounding region into chaos.

Starting in the wake of WWII, the urban, cosmopolitan political elite of the rural and agrarian nation of Afghanistan began a series of reforms and development projects that, they hoped, would bring their country into the modern era. Seeking assistance in this task, these leaders turned to the USSR, who, in addition to providing \$100 million in low-interest credit to finance the projects, also welcomed members of the country's political and military elite for training at Soviet institutions. In turn, these young Afghan elites brought communism back to their country.

The Afghan communists supported a bloodless coup in Kabul in 1973, overthrowing the king and instituting a one-party state whose government included representation by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), a pro-Soviet, Marxist-Leninist party that boasted ties to the Afghan National Army. But the PDPA, frustrated by a perceived lack of progress toward communist goals on the part of this new government, precipitated another coup in 1978. This new communist government, led by Nur Muhammad Taraki, presided over a period of dramatic reform: Land reforms sought to limit how much land a family could own; social reforms abolished Shariah law, began education of women, and sought to end forced marriage and other traditional practices; and political dissidents were rounded up and resistant villagers massacred.

Violently opposed both by the Islamic fundamentalists and conservatives in the country as well as opposing factions within his own party, Taraki was overthrown in September of 1979 and killed the following month. Taraki's successor and one-time protege, Hafizullah Amin, led an even shorter and more turbulent government. Taking over the presidency in September, Amin—who, the Russians feared, was seeking to improve

Afghanistan's relations with the United States—was deposed when Soviet forces entered the country and assassinated him on December 27th, 1979.

The official history—[written by the CIA](#), echoed by the [US State Department](#) and propounded in [Hollywood productions](#)—maintains that the US response to the events in Afghanistan—a response that would go on to include billions of dollars in arms, funds and training for the Islamic resistance to the Soviet forces—began *after* the Soviet invasion in 1979.

TERRY BOZEMAN (AS "CIA AWARD PRESENTER"): The defeat and breakup of the Soviet empire, culminating in the crumbling of the Berlin Wall, is one of the great events of world history. There were many heroes in this battle, but to Charlie Wilson must go this special recognition.

Just 13 years ago, the Soviet Army appeared to be invincible. But Charlie, undeterred, engineered a lethal body blow that weakened the Communist empire. Without Charlie, history would be hugely and sadly different.

And so, for the first time, a civilian is being given our highest recognition, that of Honored Colleague. Ladies and gentlemen of the Clandestine Services, Congressman Charles Wilson.

SOURCE: [Charlie Wilson's War](#)

But this, too, is a lie. In reality, the covert operation to aid the *mujahideen* "freedom fighters" did not begin after the Soviets invaded, and it was not the work of Charlie Wilson.

As former CIA director Robert Gates [revealed in his 1996 autobiography](#), assistance to the Afghan *mujahideen* did not start *after* the Soviet invasion, but six months *before*, in July 1979, with President Jimmy Carter signing off on a covert operation to assist and fund the resistance forces in Afghanistan. This was done in the full knowledge that these forces might antagonize and draw the Soviets into the country, which is precisely what a certain faction of the Carter White House—known as "the bleeders" for their propensity to "bleed" the Soviet Union through an engaged guerrilla conflict like the US had experienced in Vietnam—wanted to achieve.

This was confirmed two years later by Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's National Security Advisor, in a [1998 interview](#):

According to the official version of history, CIA aid to the *mujahideen* began during 1980, that is to say, after the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan on December 24, 1979. But the reality, closely guarded until now, is completely otherwise: Indeed, it was July 3, 1979 that President Carter signed the first directive for secret aid to the opponents of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul. And that very day, I wrote a note to the president in which I explained to him that in my opinion this aid was going to induce a Soviet military intervention.

The program that Carter signed off on—dubbed Operation Cyclone and billed as "[the largest covert operation in history](#)"—continued and expanded throughout the 1980s, leading to the rise of the Taliban and the encouragement of what Brzezinski called in that same interview "some agitated Muslims."

KENNETH BRANNAGH: US National Security Advisor Brzezinski flew to Pakistan to set about rallying the resistance. He wanted to arm the *mujahideen* without revealing America's role. On the Afghan border near the Khyber Pass, he urged the "Soldiers of God" to redouble their efforts.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI (in Pakistan): We know of their deep belief in God and we are confident that their struggle will succeed. That land over there is yours. You'll go back to it one day because your fight will prevail. And you'll have your homes and your mosques back again, because your cause is right and God is on your side.

BRZEZINSKI (interview): The purpose of coordinating with the Pakistanis would be to make the Soviets bleed for as much and as long as is possible.

SOURCE: [*Soldiers of God*](#) (Episode 20)

News of the struggle began to spread throughout the Arab world, and soon the stories of the brave *mujahideen* fighting the communist infidels became a rallying cry for *jihad*. The Afghan resistance had made Peshawar, just over the border in Pakistan, their headquarters, and it was there that visitors from around the Muslim world heard first-hand the tales from the battles against the Soviets and saw for themselves the squalor of the refugees who had been forced from their homes by the Russian invaders.

One such visitor was Abdullah Azzam, a passionate young Palestinian whose militant activism had cost him his job as a lecturer at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah and had prompted him to take a position in Islamabad so he could be closer to the Afghan *jihad*. But this was still not close enough, and he resigned his position to dedicate himself full time to the Afghan cause. He spent time in the refugee camps and *mujahideen* base at Peshawar, issued a [*fatwa*](#) arguing that Muslims had a duty to wage *jihad* in Afghanistan, and made frequent trips to Jeddah, where he recruited young Muslims for the cause. While in Jeddah, he stayed at the guest flat of a rich young Saudi named Osama bin Laden.

Osama bin Laden was the 17th of 54 children of Mohammed bin Awad bin Laden, an itinerant laborer from Yemen who had worked his way up in the Saudi construction industry to become one of the wealthiest non-royals in the Saudi kingdom. Mohammed bin Laden's business— today known as the Binladin Group Global Holding Company and comprising a sprawling, multibillion-dollar multinational conglomerate involved in some of the largest construction projects in the world—started from humble beginnings.

After arriving in Jeddah from his native Yemen in 1930, Mohammed bin Laden [took a job](#) as a dockworker, then as a bricklayer for Aramco during the country's first oil boom. When Aramco sought to subcontract some of the construction work it had undertaken for the Saudi government, bin Laden used the opportunity to grow his own construction firm. His exacting building standards, combined with his energy, his honesty and his willingness to work shoulder-to-shoulder with his men, earned Mohammed bin Laden a reputation as a craftsman and a teacher and brought him to the attention of King Ibn Saud's finance minister.

The aging King Saud, by now largely confined to a wheelchair, gave bin Laden the chance to renovate his palace in Jeddah so that his car could be driven by ramp directly to his second-floor bedroom. Impressed with bin Laden's work (and bin Laden's gesture of personally driving the king's car up the newly installed ramp to make sure it would hold the weight), the king awarded him with a number of increasingly important projects and even appointed him as an honorary minister of public works. Bin Laden's business, later rebranded as the Saudi Binladin Group, would go on to construct most of the kingdom's roads, renovate the Prophet's Mosque at Medina and even renovate the Grand Mosque in Mecca itself.

Although Mohammed bin Laden's fortune was split between dozens of heirs, and although Osama's father divorced his mother shortly after he was born, the younger bin Laden was still born into a life of luxury that few in the kingdom outside the royal family would ever know. Osama bin Laden's share of the family fortune has been estimated at \$30 million, and it was expected that he would, like many of his brothers, take up the family business. He studied economics and business administration at King Abdulaziz University, where he met and was influenced by Abdullah Azzam, who was by then already known for [his credo](#) "*Jihad* and the rifle alone: no negotiations, no conferences, and no dialogues."

Accounts of when and how Osama bin Laden first ended up in Afghanistan differ. According to Osama himself, speaking to Robert Fisk in his [first interview for the Western press](#) in 1993: "When the invasion of Afghanistan started, I was enraged and went there at once - I arrived within days, before the end of 1979." [Others contend](#)

that Osama had never heard of Afghanistan before the Soviet invasion and that he didn't set foot in the country itself until 1984.

Whatever the case, by the mid-1980s bin Laden was well-known as one of the key fundraisers for the Afghan cause in the Arab world, using his family connections to gather donations from rich Saudis and delivering them to Pakistan to assist the fighters in the field. In 1984, Osama and Azzam co-founded Maktab al-Khidamat (MAK), or the "Office of Services," which the US government would later [identify](#) as "the precursor organization to Al Qaeda." The group aimed to recruit the foreign fighters that were taking up Azzam's call to join the *jihad* in Afghanistan, with bin Laden providing money through his fundraising connections and with direct contributions.

Initially little more than a guest house in Peshawar where foreign recruits for the Afghan war could stop on their way to the front, the operation quickly expanded as money poured in and more fighters began to arrive. Soon it caught the attention of other figures in the Afghan war, including Gulbuddin Hekmatyar—a brutal Afghan warlord supported by the US to the [tune of \\$600 million](#) who was known for killing more Afghans than Soviets—and Dr. Ayman Al-Zawahiri, the head of Egyptian Islamic Jihad who would go on to become Osama bin Laden's right-hand man.

The New Yorker has called Zawahiri "[The Man Behind Bin Laden](#)." Syed Saleem Shahzad, a Pakistani journalist with access to senior Al Qaeda commanders, has [argued](#) it was Zawahiri, not the "figurehead" bin Laden, who "formulated the organization's ideological line and devised operational plans."

Born in a suburb of Cairo in 1951 to a distinguished middle-class family, Zawahiri went on to study medicine at Cairo University, eventually earning a master's degree in surgery and serving three years as a surgeon in the Egyptian Army before establishing his own clinic. He wore Western dress, avoided the radical Islamist activism sweeping campus in his university days, and, [according to one Westerner](#) who met him in the mid-1970s, didn't talk or act like "a traditional Muslim."

But, we are asked to believe, this was all a front. In fact, according to the authors of the officially sanctioned history of Al Qaeda, Zawahiri was a lifelong radical who had joined the Muslim Brotherhood in 1965 at the tender young age of 14 and was set on his path toward violent *jihad* the next year, after the execution of the Brotherhood's then-leader, Sayyid Qutb.

Qutb was famous for his role in inspiring a generation of radical Muslims—including Azzam, Osama and Zawahiri—to take up violent *jihad* against the West and the forces of modernity in the creation of a new caliphate. Less remembered is [Qutb's assertion](#) that—during the 1960s, when Saudi King Faisal was openly conspiring with the CIA and Aramco to stir up anti-socialist Muslim groups and undermine Pan-Arabism and Arab nationalism—"America made Islam."

The then-15-year-old Zawahiri, we are told, responded to Qutb's execution by helping to "form an underground militant cell dedicated to replacing the secular Egyptian government with an Islamic one." By the late 1970s, a number of these cells had merged into a larger militant organization, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, which, incensed by President Anwar Sadat's signing of a peace treaty with Israel, assassinated him during a military parade on October 6, 1981.

Zawahiri was one of over 300 militants rounded up in the wake of the assassination and—having the best command of English among the defendants—became their spokesman for the international press.

PRISONER: For the whole world, this is our word by Dr. Ayman Zawahiri.

AYMAN AL-ZAWAHIRI: Now we want to speak to the whole world. Who are we? Who are we? Why did they bring us here? And what we want to say? About the first question: We are Muslims. We are Muslims who believe in their religion. [inaudible] We believe in our religion, both in ideology and practice, and hence we tried our best to establish an Islamic state and an Islamic society!

SOURCE: [*The Power of Nightmares Pt. 1*](#)

Before being arrested, Zawahiri had already spent some time in Peshawar, seeing firsthand the squalor of the refugee camps and even crossing the border into Afghanistan to witness the fighting itself. After his release from prison in Egypt in 1984, Zawahiri made his way to Jeddah and then back to Peshawar.

Thus, by the mid-1980s, all of the main characters that were associated with the rise of modern Islamic terror and the founding of Al Qaeda—Azzam, Osama, Zawahiri and their early associates—were now directly involved in the war in Afghanistan. They were not a single, cohesive group—Azzam and Zawahiri were rivals for Osama's funds and attention, with Zawahiri even spreading rumours among the *mujahideen* that Azzam worked for the Americans. But together, they formed the backbone of what would come to be called the "Afghan Arabs," an inaccurate term for all of the foreign *jihadis* who came to fight in Afghanistan, both Arab (including Saudis recruited by Osama and Egyptian members of Zawahiri's Islamic Jihad group) and non-Arab (Turks, Malays and others from across the Muslim world).

The Afghan Arabs were not the main fighting force in Afghanistan. In fact, some argue they were almost totally irrelevant to the fight; making up only a small percentage of the total *mujahideen*, they often got into quarrels with the Afghan fighters and were responsible for almost no significant victories in the struggle against the Soviets. But the story of these "holy warriors" who had answered the call of *jihad* spread throughout the Muslim world, helped in no small part by their own propensity for self-promotion. Azzam [launched *Al-Jihad Magazine*](#) to help publicize the Afghan Arabs' exploits and, with Osama's funding behind him, was able to make it an international concern. Distributed in America by the Islamic Centre in Tucson, Arizona, the magazine sold thousands of copies per month in the US alone.

But for some time there has been debate about the nature of the US role in fostering and funding the Afghan Arabs. While historians, scholars and journalists agree that CIA funding for the Afghan *jihad*—estimated to be well over \$3 billion—*did* find its way to the Arab fighters, it has long been debated whether there was any direct contact between American intelligence and Osama bin Laden.

In the officially sanctioned history of the Afghan-Soviet War, the Americans were aiding the people of Afghanistan, brave "[freedom fighters](#)" who were engaged in a heroic struggle against the evil Soviet Empire.

RONALD REAGAN: The fact that freedom is the strongest force in the world is daily demonstrated by the people of Afghan. Accordingly, I am dedicating on behalf of the American people the March 22nd launch of the Columbia to the people of Afghanistan.

SOURCE: [*Afghanistan Day Proclamation Speech*](#)

REAGAN: The support that the United States has been providing the resistance will be strengthened, rather than diminished, so that it can continue to fight effectively for freedom. A just struggle against foreign tyranny can count upon worldwide support, both political and material. t

[. . .]

On behalf of the American people, I salute chairman Kalis, his delegation and the people of Afghanistan themselves.

[Applause]

You are a nation of heroes.

SOURCE: [President Reagan's Remarks After a Meeting With Afghan Resistance Leaders on November 12, 1987](#)

RICHARD CRENNNA (AS SAM TRAUTMAN): Hard to believe, John.

SYLVESTER STALLONE (AS JOHN RAMBO): What's that, sir?

TRAUTMAN: Well, I hate to admit it, but I think we're getting soft.

RAMBO: Maybe just a little, sir. Just a little.

[CAPTION: THIS FILM IS DEDICATED TO THE GALLANT PEOPLE OF AFGHANISTAN.]

SOURCE: [RAMBO III](#)

This is the story propounded by the [final report of the 9/11 Commission](#), which holds that the covert aid supplied for the operation by the United States went to Pakistan, who then distributed the funds and supplies directly to the Afghan fighters, not the Afghan Arabs. "Saudi Arabia and the United States supplied billions of dollars worth of secret assistance to rebel groups in Afghanistan fighting the Soviet occupation," the 9/11 Commission explained in the section of its report dedicated to "The Rise of bin Laden and Al Qaeda." "This assistance was funneled through Pakistan: the Pakistani military intelligence service (Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, or ISID), helped train the rebels and distribute the arms. But bin Laden and his comrades had their own sources of support and training, and they received little or no assistance from the United States."

Here the 9/11 Commission is in agreement with Zawahiri himself, who insisted in his 2001 book, [Knights Under the Prophet's Banner](#), that "the United States did not give one penny in aid to the *mujahideen*." After all, he adds: "If the Arab Afghans are the mercenaries of the United States who have now rebelled against it, why is the United States unable to buy them back now?"

Zawahiri's rhetorical question has not always been answered in the way he intended it. In fact, numerous sources over the years have pointed to just such direct contact between the US and the Afghan Arabs—and even between the CIA and Osama bin Laden himself.

There was Ted Gunderson, for example, a 27-year veteran of the FBI who claimed to have met bin Laden at the Hilton Hotel in Sherman Oaks, California, in 1986. Osama, Gunderson says, was introduced under the name "Tim Osman" and was in the midst of a US tour with a State Department handler, looking to procure weapons and support for the Afghan *jihad*. The [only document](#) that ever emerged to back this story up, however, was a crude, self-typed, single-page memo of unknown origin that only serves to throw an already dubious story into even further doubt.

Or there was journalist Joseph Trento's [claim](#) in his 2006 book, *Prelude to Terror: The Rogue CIA and the Legacy of America's Private Intelligence Network*, that "CIA money was actually funneled to MAK, since it was recruiting young Muslim men to come join the *jihad* in Afghanistan." That claim, however, comes from a "former CIA officer" who couldn't be identified because "at the time of the writing of this book, he was back in Afghanistan as a private contractor."

Or there was Simon Reeve, who wrote *The New Jackals*—the first book on Al Qaeda—in 1998. In it, he [states](#) that US agents "armed [bin Laden's] men by letting him pay rock-bottom prices for basic weapons." This claim, too, sources to an anonymous former CIA official.

In 2000, The Guardian reported on "[Bin Laden: the question facing the next US president](#)," stating flatly: "In 1986 the CIA even helped him [bin Laden] build an underground camp at Khost, where he was to train recruits from across the Islamic world in the business of guerrilla warfare." No source is provided for the claim, however.

In 2003, MSNBC Senior Correspondent Michael Moran [wrote](#) that: "Bin Laden, along with a small group of Islamic militants from Egypt, Pakistan, Lebanon, Syria and Palestinian refugee camps all over the Middle East, became the 'reliable' partners of the CIA in its war against Moscow." However, he conceded that "It should be pointed out that the evidence of bin Laden's connection to these activities is mostly classified."

Supporters of the official story, however, make a valid point: of all the things that the multimillionaire heir to the bin Laden family fortune needed on his rise to international infamy, money was *not* one of them. No, what bin Laden needed for his burgeoning terror group to thrive was not more money; it was protection.

As he turned from "Anti-Soviet warrior" to international terror mastermind, bin Laden needed officials to look the other way as his people moved across borders. He needed routine security procedures to be abandoned at key moments. He needed intelligence agencies to disconnect the dots and fail to act on information at their disposal. When members of his organization got caught, he needed strings to be pulled so his associates could continue their operation.

And, as we shall see, this is precisely the type of protection that Osama bin Laden and his associates were to receive time and again in the coming decades.

Regardless of direct western intelligence involvement in the arming, funding or training of Maktab al-Khidamat, the question soon became a moot point. As the Afghan war was drawing to its inevitable conclusion and the Soviets prepared to march back to Moscow, Osama bin Laden was already planning a new group to consolidate his international network of *mujahideen* and to take the *jihad* global.

According to [documents](#) obtained from a [March 2002 raid](#) of the Sarajevo offices of Benevolence International Foundation—a not-for-profit humanitarian relief organization that was [declared a financier of terrorism](#) in the wake of 9/11—the original idea for the founding of Al Qaeda was discussed in a [meeting on August 11, 1988](#). In attendance at the meeting: Osama bin Laden, Mohamed Atef—an Egyptian engineer and member of Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad who would go on to become Al Qaeda's military commander—Jamal al-Fadl, a Sudanese militant recruited for the Afghan war from the MAK's US headquarters in Brooklyn, and a dozen others.

There are conflicting stories about the origin of the name "Al Qaeda," which means "the base" in Arabic. Bin Laden claims that "Al Qaeda" was simply the name used for the *mujahideen* training camps and "[the name stayed](#)." Others attribute it to Abdullah Azzam, who published a brief article in *al-Jihad Magazine* in April 1988, entitled "[al-Qa'ida al-Subah](#)," or, "The Solid Base," in which he wrote:

For every invention there must be a vanguard (tali'a) to carry it forward and, while forcing its way into society, endure enormous expenses and costly sacrifices. There is no ideology, neither earthly nor heavenly, that does not require such a vanguard that gives everything it possesses in order to achieve victory for this ideology. It carries the flag all along the sheer endless and difficult path until it reaches its destination in the reality of life, since Allah has destined that it should make it and manifest itself.

This vanguard constitutes the solid base (al-Qa'ida al-Subah) for the expected society.

In 2005, former British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook [claimed](#) that Al Qaeda was literally "the database," that is, "the computer file of the thousands of *mujahideen* who were recruited and trained with help from the CIA to defeat the Russians." He did not, however, provide proof for this claim, evidence of the existence of such a database itself, or an explanation of how he knew this information.

The [founding document](#) itself mentions "Al Qaeda Al Askariya" ("the Military Base"), explaining that: "The mentioned Al Qaeda is basically an organized Islamic faction, its goal will be to lift the word of God, to make his religion victorious."

It lists the "Requirements to enter Al Qaeda":

- Members of the open duration.
- Listening and obedient.
- Good-manners.
- Referred from a trusted side.
- Obeying statutes and instructions of Al Qaida. These are from the rules of the work.

It gives the pledge for new members:

The pledge of God and his covenant is upon me, to listen and obey the superiors, who are doing this work, in energy, early-rising, difficulty, and easiness, and for his superiority upon us, so that the word of God will be the highest, and His religion victorious.

And it ends by noting that there were "thirty brothers in Al Qaeda, meeting the requirements, and thank God."

The meeting was noted by no one. In the larger scheme of things, it meant nothing. A ragtag band of thirty fighters, even if that ragtag band was led and financed by a Saudi millionaire, could accomplish very little on their own, and in the wake of the seismic forces taking place in Afghanistan at the time, it did not even register as a blip on the radar of anyone in the region. But the assistance and protection that would help steward this group of *jihadi* miscreants into a brand name for international terror was already in effect.

The early glimmers of this protection could be seen in Maktab al-Khidamat's efforts to recruit and train *mujahideen* for the Afghan *jihad* in the US. Starting in Tucson, Arizona, MAK would go on to open 30 branches in cities across the US, including their most important location, the Al Kifah Refugee Center based out of Brooklyn's Faruq Mosque. The CIA's role in aiding MAK and Al Kifah in their recruitment efforts has been an acknowledged fact for decades.

In 2001, *Newsweek* [called](#) the center "a dreary inner-city building that doubled as a recruiting post for the CIA seeking to steer fresh troops to the *mujahideen*."

In 1995, *New York Magazine* [explained](#): "The highlight for the centre's regulars were the inspirational *jihad* lecture series, featuring CIA-sponsored speakers. One week on Atlantic Avenue, it might be a CIA-trained Afghan rebel travelling on a CIA-issued visa; the next, it might be a clean-cut Arabic-speaking Green Beret, who would lecture about the importance of being part of the *mujahideen*."

J. Michael Springmann, a visa officer at the US Consulate in Jeddah from 1987 to 1989, testified how his decisions to deny visas to enter the United States to clearly unqualified applicants were routinely overridden by CIA officers at the consulate as part of their effort to "help Osama bin Laden's *mujahideen* in Afghanistan."

J. MICHAEL SPRINGMANN: I was being pressured by the Consul, General Jay Philip Freres, by a consular officer—I'm sorry, not a consular officer, a commercial officer—and various other people throughout the consulate: "We need a visa for this guy."

It wasn't a visa for my friend, it wasn't a visa for a prospective business contact. It was for somebody like the two Pakistanis who were going to a trade show in the United States: they couldn't name the trade show, they couldn't name the city in which it was being held, but a CIA case officer concealed in the commercial section demanded a visa for these people within the hour of my refusing them.

And I said, "No. They can't tell me where they're going, they can't tell me why they're going. The law is very clear: these are intending immigrants unless and until they can prove otherwise, and they haven't done it. Do you have some information that was not available to me when they applied?" He said, "No." I said, "They're not going." He went to Justice Stevens, the chief of the consular section, and got a visa for these guys.

[. . .]

And it wasn't until I was out of the Foreign Service (when my appointment had been terminated for unspecified reasons) that I learned from three good sources—Joe Trento, the journalist; a fellow attached to a university in Washington, D.C.; and a guy with expert knowledge on the Middle East who had worked for a government agency—they said, "It's very simple. The CIA and its asset, Osama bin Laden, were recruiting terrorists for the Afghan war."

They were sending them to the United States for training, for rewards, for whatever purpose and then sending them on to Afghanistan. And most likely, the problems they had with the liquor at the consulate—large amounts be disappearing and being sold at very high markups and so forth—was being used to fund this.

SOURCE: [*9/11 Citizens' Commission - 10. Michael Springman VISAs for Terrorists*](#)

In [a 1994 debriefing](#) of his experience at Jeddah, Springmann cited Sheikh Abdel-Rahman as one of the "CIA operatives" with "terrorist ties" who were being aided by this program.

Omar Abdel-Rahman, better known as "the Blind Sheikh," was born in Egypt in 1938 and lost his eyesight at just 10 months old. Studying a braille version of the Qur'an, Rahman was sent to an Islamic boarding school, and, inspired by the writings of Sayyid Qutb, earned a doctorate in quranic interpretation from Al-Azhar University in Cairo. He made a name for himself among Islamic fundamentalists for his forceful denunciations of the secular government of Nasser, who imprisoned Rahman without charge for several months. It was Rahman who issued the *fatwa* that was used to justify the assassination of Sadat, and it was in prison, on trial for his part in the assassination, that Rahman met Zawahiri.

After his release from prison, the Blind Sheikh made his way to join the *jihad* in Afghanistan, where, as even [mainstream sources](#) note, he "is said to have established links with the Central Intelligence Agency." The CIA, it was [later reported](#), had paid for Rahman to travel to Peshawar and "preach to the Afghans about the necessity of unity to overthrow the Kabul regime."

These CIA "links" served the Blind Sheikh well. As one of the most notorious Islamic radicals in the Middle East, the Blind Sheikh was on a US State Department terrorist watch list that should have barred him entry to America. Nevertheless, in May, 1990, he obtained a tourist visa to enter the United States from a consul in the US Embassy in Khartoum. When the visa was [first reported](#) to the public in December of that year, a spokesperson for the State Department insisted that the consul had "made a mistake," explaining that they "didn't follow the procedures" and failed to check Rahman's name against the State Department watchlist.

It wasn't until July of 1993, five months after the bombing of the World Trade Center directed by Rahman and aided by an FBI informant, that the truth was revealed: "Central Intelligence Agency officers reviewed all seven applications made by Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman to enter the United States between 1986 and 1990 and only once turned him down because of his connections to terrorism" [reported The New York Times](#), adding that, "while the practice is somewhat sensitive and not widely known, it is not unusual for a low-level CIA officer to be assigned a post as a consular official, as they had been in each of the seven cases." It was [later reported](#) that the visas had been "a reward for [Rahman's] services" to the CIA in Afghanistan.

Incredibly, this was not the end of the string of "lucky breaks" that allowed Rahman, the leader of the first Islamic terror cell to operate on US soil, to continue his operations unmolested.

In November of 1990, his CIA-approved tourist visa [was revoked](#), "but because of a procedural error [immigration officials] were not aware that he was in the country" and had to begin an investigation before he could be deported. Despite all of this, Rahman was still able to [obtain a green card](#) for permanent residence in the United States in April of 1991. After leaving the country and returning in August of that year, immigration officials identified that he was on a watch list and "began proceedings to rescind his residency status," but "they allowed him to re-enter the United States anyway." His green card was revoked in March of 1992, but he was still allowed to remain in the country while he applied for political asylum and plotted the World Trade Center bombing out of the MAK-founded, CIA-connected Al Qaeda stronghold in Brooklyn, the Al Kifah Refugee Center.

But as remarkable as the Blind Sheikh's story is, it is not unique. Rahman was not the only person associated with Al Qaeda's Al Kifah Center who proved able to freely enter the US despite being on a watchlist.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, the future leader of Al Qaeda, made at least [three visits to the United States](#). Despite having been imprisoned in Egypt for three years after the assassination of Sadat and despite his known role as the leader of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Zawahiri was able to enter the US and, using an alias and posing as a representative of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, [engage in fundraising](#) for his terror group. His trip was made possible by one of his most important operatives, Ali Mohamed, who had arranged the trip and provided him with the fake passport he used to enter the country.

It is in the story of Ali Mohamed, dubbed "Al Qaeda's triple agent," that the incredible ties between US intelligence and Al Qaeda are revealed. Indeed, the tale of Mohamed's unlikely career—[described](#) as "the most tantalizing and complex story in the history of al Qaeda's war against America"—is so utterly unbelievable that a Hollywood scriptwriter would reject it for being too implausible.

The son of a career soldier in the Egyptian Army, Mohamed attended the Cairo Military Academy and obtained two bachelor's degrees and a master's degree in psychology from the University of Alexandria. Mohamed followed in his father's footsteps, joining the Egyptian Army and quickly rising to the rank of major. An intelligence officer in the Egyptian Special Forces, Mohamed was a member of the same unit that carried out the assassination of Sadat in 1981. But he was not in Egypt when it happened. He was training with the US Green Berets at Fort Bragg on a foreign officer exchange program.

The FBI would [later allege](#) that it was during this training course that Mohamed was first approached by the CIA, who sought to recruit him as a foreign asset. That same year, Mohamed joined Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad and raised the suspicions of the Egyptian Army not just for his ties to the Sadat assassination unit, but for his conspicuous acts of Islamic fundamentalism, including taking time for the five daily prayers and loudly proclaiming his Islamic beliefs to anyone who would listen.

Discharged from the Egyptian Army in 1984, Mohamed—at the behest of Zawahiri—landed a job as a counterterrorism security advisor for Egypt Air. Impressed by Mohamed's abilities, [Zawahiri tasked him](#) with a

seemingly impossible challenge: infiltrate an intelligence service of the US government. Remarkably, according to the official history of Al Qaeda propounded by the very intelligence services Mohamed was tasked with infiltrating, that was exactly what he did.

According to that official story, in 1984 Mohamed turned up at the CIA station in Cairo, offering his services. The CIA took him up on the offer, sending him to Hamburg, Germany, to infiltrate a Hezbollah-linked mosque there. Upon arrival in Hamburg, Mohamed immediately announced that he had been sent by the CIA. The agency, learning of the betrayal, officially cut their ties with him, [putting Mohamed on a State Department watchlist](#) that should have prevented him from entering the US. But, as government sources later [told *The Boston Globe*](#), he was able to enter the country in 1985 anyway with the help of "clandestine CIA sponsorship." According to the report, Mohamed "benefitted from a [little known visa-waiver program](#) that allows the CIA and other security agencies to bring valuable agents into the country, bypassing the usual immigration formalities."

What happened next defies all credulity. On his flight from Athens to New York, Mohamed sat next to Linda Lee Sanchez, a single medical technician from Santa Clara, California 10 years his senior. After spending the flight in conversation, the two agreed to meet again and six weeks later they were married at the Chapel of the Bells in Reno, Nevada. Now applying for US citizenship, Mohamed enlisted in the US Army in August 1986, completing basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and receiving an Army Achievement Medal for his exemplary performance. Completing jump school and qualifying as an expert marksman on the M-16, Mohamed quickly reached the rank of E-4 and was then inexplicably posted to the Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, where he had earlier trained as a foreign exchange officer. Working as a supply sergeant for a Green Beret unit, he was soon lecturing on the Middle East to students at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center, the training center for US special forces.

ALI MOHAMED: Islam cannot survive in an area without political domination. Islam itself, as a religion, cannot survive. If I live in one area, we have to establish an Islamic state, because Islam without political domination cannot survive.

SOURCE: [*The Middle East Focus Series Presented By: Ali Mohamed*](#)

Even his commanding officer, Lt. Col. Robert Anderson, was stunned by the incredibly unlikely rise through the ranks of this watchlisted Muslim radical.

"I think you or I would have a better chance of winning Powerball (a lottery), than an Egyptian major in the unit that assassinated Sadat would have getting a visa, getting to California . . . getting into the Army and getting assigned to a Special Forces unit," Anderson later [told *The San Francisco Chronicle*](#). "That just doesn't happen. "

But it did. And the unbelievable story of Ali Mohamed did not stop there; in fact, it was only just beginning.

In 1987, Mustafa Shalabi, the emir of the Al Qaeda-linked Al Kifah Refugee Center in Brooklyn, transmitted a request from the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan for Ali Mohamed to come and train rebel troops in the camps there. Mohamed [requested a 30-day leave](#) from the Army and made his preparations to travel to Paris and from there on to Afghanistan using forged documents provided to him by *mujahideen* agents.

Mohamed made no attempt to hide his plan and Lt. Colonel Steve Neely, the JFK Special Warfare Center instructor who hired Mohamed as a lecturer, was so upset at the idea—a US soldier heading to a war zone to engage in training and, inevitably, combat, without the permission of the Army—that he sent a report up the chain of command informing his superior officers about Mohamed's plan. But he never heard back.

Ali Mohamed went to Afghanistan, where he not only provided training to the *mujahideen*, but, according to his own story, even fought and killed two Soviet Special Forces officers. When he returned to his duties at Fort

Bragg after his 30 day leave, he even presented one of his mementos—a belt from one of the Soviet soldiers he had killed—to his commanding officer.

NARRATOR: Fort Bragg, North Carolina. A month after he left for Afghanistan, Ali Mohammed returns here 11 kilograms lighter and brandishing a war trophy.

LT. COL. ROBERT ANDERSON: Then he came back and gave us a debriefing with maps and even brought back this Russian Special Forces belt. He said that he'd killed the Russian Special Forces soldier.

NARRATOR: Col. Anderson says he sent two separate reports to his superiors criticizing Ali Mohamed for his Afghan adventure. He receives no response. Anderson says he did not have enough evidence to bring charges against Mohamed.

SOURCE: [*Triple Cross: Bin Laden's Spy in America*](#)

So outrageous was Mohamed's behaviour that his commanding officer came to believe that he was being "sponsored" by a US intelligence agency. "I assumed the CIA," he [told *The San Francisco Chronicle*](#). Anderson was not alone in this belief. Back in California, Mohamed's friends also assumed his CIA ties. "Everyone in the community knew he was working as a liaison between the CIA and the Afghan cause," Ali Zaki, a San Jose obstetrician who was close to Mohamed, told [The Washington Post](#).

CIA sponsorship would explain Mohamed's incredible ability to break Army regulations at will with complete impunity. While serving in the US Armed Forces, Mohamed spent his weekends traveling from Fort Bragg to Brooklyn, where he lectured at the Al Kifah Refugee Center and began providing military training and [stolen US Special Forces documents](#) to a cell of Islamic militants based there.

Despite all of this, Mohamed received an honourable discharge from active duty in November 1989. Among [the commendations he received](#): one for "patriotism, valor, fidelity and professional excellence." He remained a member of the US Army Reserve as he returned to his wife in California and began the next leg of his career.

As we shall see, this increasingly implausible story involved Mohamed becoming an FBI informant while simultaneously training and steering the terror cells that would be linked to the World Trade Center bombing, the US Embassy bombings and the other spectacular attacks in the 1990s that would make Al Qaeda synonymous with international terrorism, evading the justice system for years and then disappearing off the face of the planet.

By the time Mohamed left active duty at the end of 1989, the world order was beginning to shift. The Soviets had retreated from Afghanistan and within two short years the Soviet Union itself had ceased to exist. The Cold War was over and the public was promised a new world of peace and tranquility.

GEORGE H. W. BUSH: We stand tonight before a new world of hope and possibilities for our children, a world we could not have contemplated a few years ago. The challenge for us now is to engage these new states in sustaining the peace and building a more prosperous future.

SOURCE: [*Cold war ended 25 December 1991*](#)

But this promised "new world of hope" never arrived. Instead, the world was about to be thrust into a new age of terror. And the public face of that terror, a young Saudi millionaire who was still being touted as an "Anti-Soviet Warrior," had just cobbled together his band of Islamic militants, his Al Qaeda "base," in the training camps of Afghanistan.

And, as we will see, as the world plunged into this new era of violence, the planners of the American Empire—like the planners of the British Empire before them—were more than willing to aid, protect and use these radical Muslims to attain their own ends.

TO BE CONTINUED . . .

Part Two: 9/11

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TRANSCRIPT

"The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket. Revolution, legality—counter-moves in the same game; forms of idleness at bottom identical."

Joseph Conrad

INTRODUCTION

Alexandria, Egypt. July 23, 1954.

It's Revolution Day in Egypt and the streets of Alexandria are teeming with revelers. Two men—Victor Levy and Philip Natanson—pick their way through the crowd on their way to the cinema quarter, each nervously clutching a device in their pocket. Eyeing the fire trucks parked at the intersections, Philip leans over to Victor and whispers: "They're expecting us."

They reach the steps of the Rio Cinema just as the audience from the afternoon showing begin pouring out of the entrance. They fight their way through the stream of people and into the foyer and immediately see a man in the usual garb of an Egyptian plainclothes detective waiting for them. Philip turns to run away but instantly a wave of heat begins to sear his thigh. He tries to tell Victor to run, but no words come out. Instead, a white hot flame leaps from his trousers. He squeezes his thigh with all his strength in a vain attempt to stop the flame before the bomb can ignite—but it's too late.

There's an explosion.

Philip lies on the ground, his arms and legs burnt black from the bomb. Victor is nowhere to be seen. Soon, a police sergeant arrives, along with the plainclothes detective. Someone in the crowd shouts, "Take care! He may have another bomb!" But the sergeant moves in all the same. "Don't worry. We were waiting for them."

The police *had* been expecting them. Victor and Philip were Egyptian Jews, members of a sleeper cell established by Israeli military intelligence in 1951.

The Israelis had watched in dismay as the military coup in Egypt in 1952 led to the rise of Gamel Abdel Nasser, who was not only hostile to Israel, but who, as a perceived anti-communist, was securing military and financial aid from the Americans and even the British. With Britain already staging talks to withdraw from their Suez military base, Israel decided to act. In 1954, they activated their military intelligence sleeper cell in the country for an audacious mission. Codenamed [Operation Susannah](#), their plan was to stage an increasingly spectacular series of bombings in Cairo and Alexandria.

The first bombing—an explosion at the Alexandria central post office on July 2nd—had gone off without a hitch. The second, a simultaneous attack on the American Libraries in Cairo and Alexandria, was similarly successful. It was their third attack—an ambitious attempt to bomb two cinemas in Cairo, two in Alexandria and the Cairo railway station—that failed, derailing the operation. Ten members of the cell were rounded up. [Of the ten](#), two committed suicide in the course of their interrogations by the Egyptian police, two more were executed, and six were sentenced to prison, eventually making their way to Israel after their release.

After decades of internal Israeli investigations, finger-pointing, political scandal and high-profile resignations, the full truth of Operation Susannah remains shrouded in official secrecy. The Israeli government did not even formally acknowledge the incident until 2005, a full half-century after the affair, when nine of the agents were [officially commended for their service](#).

But the reasoning behind the operation was revealed during one of the commissions of inquiry that was established to examine the affair. [According to one officer](#) who was given oral instructions directly from Israel's Military Intelligence chief, Binyamin Gibli:

[Our goal is] to break the West's confidence in the existing [Egyptian] regime The actions should cause arrests, demonstrations, and expressions of revenge. The Israeli origin should be totally covered while attention should be shifted to any other possible factor. The purpose is to prevent economic and military aid from the West to Egypt.

In short, the Israelis had attempted a false flag operation, hoping to blame their own spectacular acts of violence on the Muslim Brotherhood or the communists in order to destabilize Nasser's government, undermine Western confidence in its Egyptian ally, and persuade the British military to remain at their Suez base.

The operation was a failure in every sense. The cell was discovered and its members imprisoned. Their actions did *not* destabilize the Nasser government, nor did they influence the relationship between Egypt and the West. And the British *did* leave their base in 1956, after an abortive Israeli/British/French invasion of the region was brought to an end by the US and the Soviets. But it *did* implant an idea in the minds of the Western military planners: that acts of terrorism could be staged and blamed on Muslim scapegoats to further their own political goals.

As we shall see, it was not long before America's military brass were forwarding their own operational plans making use of this tactic . . . plans that would culminate in the most spectacular terrorist attack the world had yet seen.

Part Two: 9/11

Tuesday, September 11, 2001, dawned temperate and nearly cloudless in the eastern United States.

EARLY SHOW: Miles and miles of sunshine. Miles Davis. Going to put Miles out there today. Nice as it could be across the Northeast. Rough seas still from the chop from that hurricane, but other than that it's kind of quiet around the country. We like quiet. It's quiet. It's too quiet.

SOURCE: [September 11, 2001 - 8:31am EDT on WUSA - The Early Show](#)

In a matter of moments, however, the quiet of that Tuesday morning transformed into the turbulence of 9/11, and the world seemed to turn upside down. As the events of that day played out like a Hollywood movie on TV screens around the world, the meaning of those events was still far from clear. Who was behind this attack? Why were they attacking? What did the perpetrators hope to gain from it?

And yet it was there, in the initial hours of those chaotic events—years before the congressional inquiries and presidential commissions presumed to answer those questions—that all of the essential pieces of the official story of 9/11 were laid out on the tv screens of the American public.

8:50 AM

DIANE SAWYER: We want to tell you what we know as we know it, but we just got a report in that there's been some sort of explosion at the World Trade Center in New York City. One report said—and we can't confirm any of this—that a plane may have hit one of the two towers of the World Trade Center, but again you're seeing the live pictures here.

SOURCE: [*September 11, 2001 - 8:50am EDT on WJLA - ABC News Good Morning America*](#)

9:03 AM

JON SCOTT: There was a pilot who flew— There was another one! We just saw— We just saw another one. We just saw another one apparently go— Another plane just flew into the second tower. This raises— This has to be deliberate, folks.

CORRESPONDENT: Well, that would begin to say that, yeah.

SCOTT: We just saw on live television as a second plane flew into the second tower of the World Trade Center. Now, given what has been going on around the world, some of the key suspects come to mind: Osama bin Laden. Who knows what?

SOURCE: [*Original News Broadcast on 9/11/01*](#)

11:51 AM

MARK WALSH: I was watching with my roommate—it was approximately several minutes after the first plane had hit. I saw this plane come out of nowhere and just ream right into the side of the Twin Tower, exploding through the other side. And then I witnessed both towers collapse, one first and then the second, mostly due to structural failure because the fire was just too intense.

SOURCE: [*FOX News 9-11-2001 Live Coverage 8:46 A.M E.T - 5:00 P.M E.T*](#)

11:54 AM

JERROLD POST: I am sure the highest degree of probability associated with this attack, which had remarkable coordination and logistical sophistication, would be Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda group.

SOURCE: [*September 11, 2001 - 11:54am EDT on WTTG*](#)

5:54 PM

KATIE COURIC: One senior US intelligence official says now that the US is 90% certain that bin Laden was responsible for today's attack.

SOURCE: [*September 11, 2001 - 5:54pm EDT on WRC - News 4 at 5*](#)

8:22 PM

PETER JENNINGS: He—an engineer and an architect—speculates here that the heat above the crash site on the twin trade towers may have indeed caused the building above to melt, just simply collapsing in itself and

putting enormous weight on the rest of the building below, which could not possibly stand it. Now the steel columns which go up through the building, built to code at best, would only be able, he believes, to have been able to stand an hour or an hour and a half of intense fire like this, pressing down on the rest of the building until it finally was able to give way.

SOURCE: [September 11, 2001 - 8:22pm EDT on WJLA](#)

Remarkably, these initial, off-the-cuff speculations turned out to be—according to the various inquiries and investigations that followed—accurate in all their main respects. Osama bin Laden, the mastermind of the Al Qaeda terrorist organization, *had* planned and directed this attack. The Twin Towers *had* collapsed due to structural failure, because the fire was just too intense.

These assertions, drilled into the minds of a susceptible audience still reeling in shock from the horror of the events they had just witnessed, became the core tenets of what would become enshrined in the final report of the 9/11 Commission as the "official story" of 9/11.

In this official story, Osama bin Laden, once the "[anti-Soviet warrior on the road to peace](#)," was now an international terror kingpin. Radicalized by the arrival of US military forces in the Arabian peninsula in the Gulf War, he [issued a fatwa](#) against the United States and began a series of strikes on US targets; first bombing the US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998, and then bombing the USS Cole while it was harbored in Aden in October of 2000.

According to this version of events, the 9/11 plot was hatched by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, a "highly educated" Pakistani militant who presented the "[planes operation](#)"—as the 9/11 Commission asserts it was originally known—to Osama bin Laden and his chief of operations, Mohammed Atef, in 1996. It was bin Laden, we are told, who greenlighted the operation "sometime in late 1998 or early 1999." The three of them developed a list of buildings to be targeted—the White House, the U.S. Capitol, the Pentagon, and the World Trade Center—and bin Laden himself handpicked the men he wanted to carry out the operation.

Carefully moving their operatives into place over the course of the next two years, this crack terror squad—devoted Muslim radicals willing to die for their beliefs—succeeded through a combination of skill and the colossal failure of the American intelligence complex, hindered by bureaucracy and hampered by a lack of political will to recognize the growing threat of Islamic terror.

No individual was to blame for this "failure," the official story of 9/11 concludes, but the remedy to the problems presented by the 9/11 attack was obvious: to erect a new homeland security complex, tear down the walls between foreign intelligence and domestic policing, implement warrantless surveillance and other legally dubious means of disrupting potential terror threats on the home front, and launch a war on terror abroad to bring the battle to the terrorists.

But this narrative, now enshrined as the official history of 9/11—that the 9/11 plot was hatched by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in 1996, that it was directed by terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden and that it was executed by Al Qaeda so flawlessly that the intelligence agencies could not have even envisioned it, let alone prevented it—

GEORGE W. BUSH: Nobody in our government, at least—and I don't think the prior government—could envision flying airplanes into buildings.

SOURCE: [The President's News Conference - April 13, 2004](#)

—is now contested in every respect, even by defenders of that official history.

As even mainstream authors like Jason Burke were forced to admit, the popular conception of Al Qaeda—that of a top-down organization with a single leader overseeing its operations—was a convenient fiction, created by the FBI so they could [prosecute bin Laden in absentia](#) for the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa. In order to prosecute bin Laden, they had to show that Al Qaeda "coordinates the activities of its global membership" and that bin Laden, as the leader of the group, bears the responsibility for any actions attributed to the organization.

JASON BURKE: The idea, which is critical to the FBI's prosecution—that bin Laden ran a coherent organization with operatives and cells all around the world, of which you could be a member—is a myth. There is no Al Qaeda organization. There is no international network with a leader, with carders who will unquestionably obey orders, with tentacles that stretch out to sleeper cells in America, in Africa, in Europe. That idea of a coherent structured terrorist network with an organized capability simply does not exist.

SOURCE: [The Power Of Nightmares: Part 3 The Shadows In The Cave \(2004\)](#)

Even the 9/11 Commission's final report had to admit that Al Qaeda was less of a mafia-like organization with a capo served by his faithful lieutenants and more of a funding organization for "[terrorist entrepreneurs](#)." "Al Qaeda's worldwide terrorist operations," the report conceded, "relied heavily on the ideas and work of enterprising and strong-willed field commanders who enjoyed considerable autonomy."

As we saw in Part 1 of this exploration, Origin Story, these "terrorist entrepreneurs" included among their ranks renowned international Islamic radicals—like "The Blind Sheikh," Omar Abdel Rahman—and lesser-known but incredibly prolific terror cell leaders—like Ali Mohamed—whose remarkable abilities to evade State Department watch lists and foment and direct spectacular terror attacks directly under the nose of the intelligence agencies defies explanation . . . unless one assumes, as their closest associates did, that they were working under the purview of those intelligence agencies.

In order to better understand this aspect of the story, we have to return to 1990, the year that the specter of Islamic terror appeared on the shores of the United States.

Abdullah Azzam—Osama bin Laden's mentor and co-founder with bin Laden of the Maktab al-Khidamat (MAK), or the "Office of Services," which provided funding, training and an international support network to the "Afghan Arabs" during the Soviet-Afghan war—is dead, killed in a car bombing in Peshawar, Pakistan. It is never determined who committed the assassination, but Azzam's death resolves a dispute about the future of the *jihad* movement. Azzam had favoured continuing the fight in Afghanistan, pressing for the formation of an Islamic regime in Kabul. Bin Laden had other ideas; and now, as the undisputed leader of the old MAK network, he is free to pursue those ideas under the "Al Qaeda" banner.

But "Al Qaeda," at this point, barely even exists as a propaganda construct. Despite [grandiose visions](#) of creating "a unified global *jihad* movement," the withdrawal of the Soviets from Afghanistan and the end of the war leaves the group's future in doubt. Bin Laden returns to Saudi Arabia, looking for ways to leverage his family's wealth and power to make a name for himself in the Muslim world.

Meanwhile, in New York, the era of "Islamic terror" in the United States is about to begin.

Manhattan, New York. November 5, 1990.

Meir Kahane—an Orthodox Jewish rabbi and a [convicted terrorist](#) whose anti-Arab views were considered so extreme he was [banned from the Israeli Knesset](#)—has just finished delivering a speech in the Morgan D Room of the New York Marriott East Side Hotel. Leaving the podium, Kahane has begun mingling with the crowd. Suddenly one man, Sayyid Nosair, draws a .357 Magnum and fires, hitting Kahane twice, once in the neck.

Nosair flees, shooting one of Kahane's supporters in the leg in his rush out the door. His accomplice, Mahmud Abouhalima, is supposed to be waiting at the front door in a taxi to drive him away, but the doorman had waved Abouhalima away moments earlier, so Nosair jumps in the wrong cab by mistake. When he realizes his error, he brandishes the .357, ordering the cabbie to start driving. Instead, the driver scrambles out of the taxi and runs away.

Nosair is forced to flee on foot, racing down Lexington Avenue with his gun still in hand. Carlos Acosta, a US postal inspector, tries to stop him, drawing his weapon, but it's too late; Nosair fires first, hitting Acosta in the shoulder. Undeterred, Acosta drops to his knee, steadies himself and shoots back, hitting Nosair in the neck. Both Nosair and Kahane are rushed to Bellevue Hospital's trauma unit. Nosair survives his emergency operation. Kahane does not.

The dramatic events of that November night would culminate in an even more surprising verdict 13 months later. Not only was Nosair treated as a "lone gunman" acting of his own accord, but he was not even convicted of Kahane's murder. Despite such a brazen assassination—perpetrated in a crowded room and followed by a spectacular chase—Nosair was acquitted of murder, convicted instead on four lesser counts, including gun possession, assault and coercion. He was sentenced to just 22 years.

So, what went wrong? The jurors contend that they had "reasonable doubt" of Nosair's guilt because "the prosecution did not offer a witness during the five-week trial who saw the defendant fire the fatal shots" and—since Kahane's family had opposed an autopsy—the fatal bullet could not be matched to Nosair's weapon. But, in reality, the fix was in from the start. As even the Congressional Joint Inquiry into the 9/11 attacks conceded in a [staff statement](#) a decade after the trial:

According to FBI officials who were interviewed, the NYPD and the District Attorney's office resisted attempts to label the Kahane assassination a 'conspiracy' despite the apparent links to a broader network of radicals. Instead, these organizations reportedly wanted the appearance of speedy justice and a quick resolution to a volatile situation. By arresting Nosair, they felt they had accomplished both.

The typically bureaucratic wording of the statement obscures the reality: the NYPD and the District Attorney's office didn't just passively resist the attempts to "label" the assassination a "conspiracy"; they deliberately covered up vitally important information that would have unwound that conspiracy and undermined the next decade of spectacular Al Qaeda terrorism.

Immediately after his arrest, forty-seven boxes of material were seized from Nosair's house in New Jersey. [Among those materials](#) were Top Secret training manuals from Fort Bragg and [Secret communiqués](#) from the US Joint Chiefs of Staff. Lest there be any doubt where the materials came from, they even discovered a video of Ali Mohammed's lectures at the Kennedy Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg. But those weren't the only pieces of evidence that connected the Kahane assassination conspiracy—now commonly portrayed as the first act of Islamic terrorism on US soil—to Ali Mohammed, the remarkable CIA asset, US Army officer and FBI informant who, we are told, was "Al Qaeda's" strangely untouchable "triple agent" in the heart of the American intelligence establishment.

El Sayyid Nosair himself—the 34-year old Egyptian-born janitor with a [penchant for Prozac](#) who quite literally got away with murder—was, as it turns out, not unknown to the authorities. In fact, he had been known to the FBI since at least the previous summer. That's when, as it was later admitted, Nosair and a ragtag bunch of associates had been surveilled loading up a convoy of vehicles with semi-automatic weapons and copious amounts of ammo and heading to the Calverton Shooting Range on Long Island.

For four consecutive Sundays in July of 1989, the FBI's elite Special Operations Group—[apparently tipped off](#) that "PLO terrorists were threatening to blow up casinos in Atlantic City"—[followed Nosair's convoy to the](#)

[shooting range](#), snapping dozens of photographs of the group engaging in target practice with handguns, rifles and even an AK-47.

The group had set off from the Brooklyn Al Kifah Refugee Center—Al Qaeda's New York office, which, [as we have seen](#), not only operated in full view of the intelligence community but "doubled as a recruiting post for the CIA seeking to steer fresh troops to the *mujahideen*" in Afghanistan.

Among those in attendance at the FBI-surveilled target practice sessions:

- Nosair himself, brandishing the chrome-plated .357 that he would later use to slay Kahane;
- Clement Rodney Hampton-El, an American-born black Muslim medical technician known as "Dr. Rashid," who claimed to have been wounded in Afghanistan;
- Mahmud Abouhalima, known as "the Red" for his curly red hair, covered during the sessions by an NRA cap;
- Nidal Ayyad, a Kuwaiti who had taken classes to become a US citizen; and
- Mohammed Salameh, a Palestinian who grew up in Jordan and studied under Abdullah Azzam.

Not present at those sessions in July, however, was the group's trainer, Ali Mohammed, the remarkable Al Qaeda "triple agent" who had been taking weekend breaks from his post at the heart of the US Army's Special Forces training center at Fort Bragg to instruct the Al Kifah cell in the techniques of guerrilla warfare, including bomb-making and weapons-handling.

Nosair and his fellow Al Kifah plotters had been under surveillance by the FBI. Mohammed, their handler came straight from Fort Bragg, providing them with Top Secret government documents and personally overseeing their training. But, incredibly, none of these points were raised at Nosair's trial for the murder of Kahane. FBI officers who tried to follow the leads into the bigger plot were ordered to stand down.

INTERVIEWER: What was your feeling about the "lone gunman" theory?

ROBERT FRIEDMAN: I thought it was preposterous. Based on what my sources in the NYPD told me that they were ordered to treat this as a simple homicide, based on what my sources in the FBI told me that every time that they got a little bit ambitious and started broadening their investigation to search out El Sayyid Nosair's possible alleged terrorist links, they were told from the top to cool it, to stop investigating. That the NYPD would handle it as a simple homicide.

SOURCE: [Hidden Path To 9/11](#)

And, according to the official history, the boxes of Arabic documents seized from Nosair's house were not translated until years later.

Nosair's "not guilty" verdict was cheered by his supporters, and the same cadre of Ali Mohammed-trained radicals who had been surveilled at the shooting range by the FBI moved on to plot their next spectacular terror attack: the bombing of the World Trade Center.

And, as would be revealed in dramatic fashion years after the event, this plot, too, had an FBI informant at its heart.

DAN RATHER: Last winter, the FBI was praised for its speed in cracking the case of the World Trade Center bombing and bringing four suspects to trial. Now there is some evidence that the FBI may have known of the plot in advance through an informant and might—*might*—even have stopped the bombing that killed six people.

SOURCE: [*FBI could have stopped the 1993 World Trade Center bombing*](#)

When Emad Salem—a former lieutenant colonel in the Egyptian army who [arrived in the United States in 1988](#)—began working as an FBI asset, he was not originally assigned to infiltrate Islamic terror groups. No, in 1988 the Cold War was still on and the FBI tasked Salem with penetrating KGB and Russian mafia rings operating in New York City.

But by 1991, things had changed. With the Cold War over, the Bureau's priorities were shifting. Salem's handler, Nancy Floyd, who appreciated his work, thought the Egyptian informant's background might make him useful to the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force. Salem's new handlers in the Bureau's counterterror division, Louie Napoli and John Anticev, put him to work infiltrating the groups raising funds for international Islamic terror on US soil. His first priority: insinuating himself into the ring around the Blind Sheikh, Omar Abel Rahman, including El Sayyid Nosair, then on trial for the slaying of Kahane, and his Calverton shooting range associates.

Salem was remarkably successful in his assignment. Haunting the trial of Nosair, he soon befriended Nosair's cousin, Ibrahim el-Gabrownny. El-Gabrownny immediately took to the affable Egyptian, introducing Salem to Nosair in jail and describing him as "a new member of the family." In a mere matter of weeks, Salem was caught on camera as one of Rahman's bodyguards, even [personally driving the Blind Sheikh](#) to Detroit to deliver fundraising speeches.

Soon thereafter, el-Gabrownny invited Salem to join him for dinner at his Brooklyn apartment. There, after turning up the television in the dining room, explaining that he [feared the apartment was bugged](#), el-Gabrownny sought to recruit Salem for a special mission.

EMAD SALEM: I was in Brooklyn with Ibrahim el-Gabrownny. Ibrahim el-Gabrownny is Sayyid Nosair's cousin. He said that "We should start to do something, brother, so the government has some pressure and they don't put Brother Sayyid in more troubles."

So I said, "Sure, of course we should do something."

He said, "OK, and you know how to build a bomb?"

I said, "Of course! That's what we do!"

He said, "OK, I want you to build some bombs and I'll tell you later. What do you need?"

So I said to Ibrahim el-Gabrownny, "I need explosives, I need detonators, I need people to help me build the bombs, I need a safe place to build a bomb in."

He said, "OK. Let me make some phone calls to Afghanistan."

SOURCE: [*The Terror Routes - E1. 1979-1993 Angels & Demons*](#)

At this early stage, the plot was less of a precise plan and more of a vague idea, devoid of details. Even the target of the proposed attack was undecided, with Salem being told that the group intended to set off bombs at twelve "Jewish locations," including temples, banks and Jewish centres around Brooklyn and Manhattan. Without knowing it and with hardly any effort, Salem had been recruited into an operation that would eventually result in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

Salem worked the plot as best he could, meeting more of the Calverton shooting range associates and gathering information from the cell members to pass along to the Bureau. As the preparations for the bombing began to

take shape, Salem's role in the FBI sting operation seemed clear: he would lead the cell along, swapping out the explosives for a harmless powder before the bombs were placed. Then, when the cell was ready to strike, the FBI would swoop in and round up the plotters.

But that is not what happened.

Salem's remarkable success in infiltrating an active plot to stage terror attacks in New York—something that most FBI assets fail to accomplish in the course of their career— is, in retrospect, stunning. But not as stunning as the FBI's response to this incredible turn of events.

As author and journalist Peter Lance, who interviewed many of the FBI personnel involved in the story, explained in his book, [*Triple Cross*](#):

[P]art of Salem's deal with the Feds was that he would be a deep cover "asset," as opposed to an informant who was willing to tape conversations and swear to his undercover evidence on the stand. Salem, who had family in Egypt, was deeply wary of the Blind Sheikh's deadly reach. So the Bureau promised him that he'd never have to wear a wire or testify in open court.

But in June 1992, Carson Dunbar—a [rising young star](#) in the FBI's New York Office—was appointed to head the counterterror division. Dunbar and his deputy, John Crouthamel, didn't trust Salem. Soon they were trying to get him to submit to additional polygraphs and, eventually, they broke their deal with Salem and demanded he wear a wire. Salem refused and withdrew from the operation, shutting the FBI out of the bomb plot.

SALEM: It was a silly, personal confrontation. And, actually, he said (and I quote him), "You son of a bitch! Coming from the Middle East, dragging sand in your shoes all the way up to here to tell me how to run my FBI and how to do my job!"

I told him, "Sir, I *am* doing your job. None of your agents could have went undercover that deep. I'm doing it, you're not."

And that even provoked him more and he said, "Get out of here!"

I walked out of his office, I looked at Nancy and John. I said, "Guys, when this bomb been built by somebody and goes off by somebody else, don't come knock on my door!"

And that was it. And I walked away.

SOURCE: [*The Terror Routes - E1. 1979-1993 Angels & Demons*](#)

With Salem out of the picture, the Ali Mohammed-trained, Blind Sheikh-supported, Al Kifah-connected cell continued on with their plot. But, with internal disputes disrupting their plans, they had to find someone else to actually build the bomb. They found that person in Ramzi Yousef.

To this day, despite having been caught, tried and convicted for the World Trade Center bombing, little is known about Ramzi Yousef's origins, or even his identity. The 9/11 Commission—[relying on the torture testimony](#) of his uncle, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed—identified him merely as a "Sunni extremist" whose real name was Abdul Basit. But this supposedly devout Muslim fundamentalist is [reported to have](#) hung out at karaoke bars and dated b-girls during his trips to the Philippines while his wife and daughters waited for him in Baluchistan. Even his birthplace remains a mystery.

What *is* known is that Yousef [learned bomb-making](#) in Osama bin Laden's training camps in Afghanistan in the early 1990s, [perhaps from Ali Mohammed himself](#); that in 1995 [Newsday reported](#) the FBI was "considering a probe of whether the CIA had any relationship with Yousef;" and that in 1999 Swiss journalist Richard Labeviere [reported](#), "A classified FBI file indicates that he was recruited by the local branch of the CIA."

And, like so many of the other key operatives in the Al Qaeda story, Yousef was able to avoid regular screening procedures, waltz across borders with forged travel documents and enter the United States without a visa.

On August 31, 1992, Yousef and Ahmad Ajaj—a fellow *mujahideen* who Yousef had allegedly met at the training camps in Afghanistan—flew from Pakistan to the US despite lacking the proper travel documents to do so, a miraculous feat that the FBI [has alleged](#) was enabled by "direct assistance from senior Pakistani intelligence officials." Upon their arrival at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York on September 1st, both men were immediately detained by immigration officials.

Ajaj, acting "[loud and belligerent](#)," was caught with a crudely forged Swedish passport and taken to a back office for questioning. "The U.S. government was pretty sure Ahmad Mohammad Ajaj was a terrorist from the moment he stepped foot on U.S. soil," the *Los Angeles Times* [later reported](#), noting that his suitcases were "stuffed with fake passports, fake IDs and a cheat sheet on how to lie to U.S. immigration inspectors." But that wasn't all; among his possessions, inspectors also found two handwritten notebooks filled with bomb recipes, six bomb-making guides that included pages from [Fort Bragg military manuals](#), and four how-to videotapes concerning weaponry and surveillance training. Ajaj was charged with passport violations and sentenced to six months in prison.

Yousef, meanwhile, tried a different approach. Dressed in "[traditional peasant garb](#)" and carrying an Iraqi passport without a US visa, Yousef strode confidently up to the immigration inspector and declared himself to be a refugee seeking asylum from the oppressive Iraqi government, politely asking to be admitted into America. After being questioned and fingerprinted, one alert immigration official [noted his links to Ajaj](#) and sought to detain him, but "[there was not enough room in the INS lockup](#)," so he was released on the condition that he show up at an asylum hearing later.

Yousef then left the airport, took a cab to New York's East Village and immediately met with Mahmud Abouhalima, "the Red," who had trained with Ali Mohammed and who had served as the getaway driver for Nosair before being waved away by the hotel doorman. Yousef set about professionalizing the ragtag band of misfits, transforming their vague "Jewish locations" plot into an altogether more ambitious plan: to plant a bomb in the basement of one of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, collapsing it into the other tower and killing tens of thousands in the process. He got to work immediately, organizing the cell, renting a storage locker across the Hudson River in Jersey City and beginning the five month task of constructing the bomb.

Without Salem, the FBI ostensibly no longer had an asset in the cell to watch as the plot took shape. But, if there had been a serious investigation underway, unraveling the cell and discovering their intentions would have been trivial. Ahmad Ajaj, who had been caught with a raft of terrorist training materials and bomb-making guides, [remained in contact without Yousef](#) the whole time, speaking to him frequently via the prison phone. But, although those calls were taped, no one from the FBI or any other agency monitored or even attempted to translate those phone calls until after the World Trade Center explosion the following February, and no one traced the pair's flights back to discover that they had both boarded in Pakistan without the proper travel documents and had even sat together for the first leg of their journey to New York.

Salem even tried one last time to warn the FBI about the cell. Meeting his old handler, Nancy Floyd, at a Subway sandwich shop near the FBI's New York office in October of 1992 to collect his final \$500 cash payment, he informed her that he had heard that the group was planning a new attack and begged her to put surveillance on Abouhalima and Salameh. But it was no use. Carson Dunbar had taken her off the terror

investigation and all she could do was pass along the suggestion. Salem's warning was ignored and no one followed up on the lead.

The FBI had followed the Al Kifah plotters to the shooting range, investigated their role in the Kahane murder, had an informant in their midst reporting on their plans for a spectacular terror attack and now another high-level terror operative had been allowed to enter the country and proceed with his activities unmolested, just as Ali Mohammed and the Blind Sheikh before him.

And so it was that at noon on February 26, 1993, Ramzi Yousef and Eyad Ismoil, a Jordanian associate, drove a yellow Ryder van into the underground parking garage of the World Trade Center, parking on the B-2 level. Yousef ignited the 20-foot fuse and fled. Twelve minutes later, the bomb went off.

The bomb—cutting through the parking garage with an explosive force of 150,000 pounds per square inch—might have lacked the explosive force to fulfill Yousef's goal of toppling the towers, but it *did* wreak havoc. Six people died, over a thousand were injured and 50,000 were forced to evacuate the building in the chaotic aftermath of the explosion. Learning of the bombing, Bruce Hoffman, a terrorism expert working for the Rand Corporation, [remarked](#): "We may be talking about the opening salvo of a new conflict for a New World Order."

As the investigation into the bombing began, a [letter](#) arrived in the offices of various New York newspapers claiming responsibility for the attack. The letter, sent under the name "Liberation Army, Fifth Battalion" issued three demands: end US aid to Israel, end diplomatic relations with Israel and stop interfering with the internal affairs of Middle Eastern nations. If these demands were not met, the letter promised that 150 suicide soldiers would be ready to commit more attacks, including launching strikes on "potential Nuclear targets."

If there *was* any doubt about who was behind the explosion, those doubts were quickly dispelled. Just two days into the investigation, in one of the FBI's first descents into the pitch-black, smoke-filled, five-story crater left by the blast, an explosives enforcement officer from the ATF found the proverbial "[needle in the haystack](#)": a [part from the Ryder van](#) itself bearing a Vehicle Identification Number.

The van rental was traced back to Mohammed Salameh, one of Ali Mohammed's trainees from the Al Kifah center. Absurdly, Salameh was apprehended on March 4, one week after the bombing, when he returned to the Ryder rental office in Jersey City to reclaim the deposit on the van. Salameh's arrest quickly led to the arrest and eventual conviction of three others in the Al Kifah cell: Nidal Ayyad, Mahmud Abouhalima and Ahmad Ajaj. It also led investigators to the apartment of Ramzi Yousef.

But it was too late. Ramzi Yousef had boarded a flight to Karachi the night of the bombing and then vanished, flying from country to country with impunity, plotting assassinations and bombings in Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines and Iran, and concocting an elaborate plot called "Bojinka" to blow up a number of airliners in mid-flight before finally being captured in Pakistan in 1995.

But it was not just Yousef himself—the mysteriously protected terror mastermind who had entered the US without a visa—who vanished. When Pakistani federal investigators later went to check their immigration records, they discovered that all of the documents pertaining to Yousef's journey to the United States in 1992, including his embarkation card, had "[mysteriously disappeared](#)."

In the wake of the bombing, the FBI—now facing enormous public pressure to round up those involved and bust the terror cell that they had infiltrated and abandoned just the year before—turned once again to Emad Salem. Once again, Salem was able to quickly penetrate the Blind Sheikh's cell and to begin working with them on a new scheme, the so-called "landmarks" plot to bomb key targets around New York City, including the UN headquarters, the Lincoln Tunnel and the George Washington Bridge. This time, the FBI arrested the plotters before they could stage their attack.

But at the trial two years later, Salem had a surprise for the prosecution. He had secretly recorded dozens of phone conversations with his FBI handlers, conversations that [revealed for the first time](#) the FBI's *real* role in the World Trade Center bombing.

JACQUELINE ADAMS: FBI agents might have been able to prevent last February's deadly explosion at New York's World Trade Center. They discussed secretly substituting harmless powder for the explosives. But they didn't, according to the FBI's own informant, Emad Salem.

Unbeknownst to the FBI at the time, Salem recorded many of his conversations with his handlers.

WILLIAM KUNSTLER: I'm holding nine hundred and three pages of draft transcripts . . .

ADAMS: William Kunstler represents Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman and several others charged with conspiring to blow up a series of New York City landmarks four months after the World Trade Center bombing. That case has not yet gone to trial.

Kunstler confirmed newspaper reports of the Salem transcripts. In one, Salem complains to an FBI agent, "Since the bomb went off, I feel terrible. I feel bad. I feel: here is people who don't listen." The agent replies: "Hey, I mean it wasn't like you didn't try and I didn't try. You can't force people to do the right thing."

SOURCE: [*FBI could have stopped the 1993 World Trade Center bombing*](#)

Predictably, in the wake of the blast, the debate began to center on the government's "mismanagement" of the case. The Blind Sheikh's entry to the US had been a "mistake." The NYPD's refusal to investigate Nosair's accomplices in the killing of Kahane had just been a politically expedient omission. The FBI having pulled their informant out of an active terror plot before it developed into the World Trade Center bombing was simply "incompetence." The presence of a CIA-linked, Fort Bragg-stationed Green Beret in the midst of this radical terror cell was just an example of "blowback." And Ramzi Yousef's miraculous ability to enter and leave countries at will without the proper documentation was just the result of bureaucratic bungling and overworked immigration officials.

The admissions of "error" and professions of "blowback" verged on admissions of guilt. Even the CIA—in an internal investigation into its role in supporting the Al Kifah center's operations—[concluded](#) that the agency itself was "partly culpable" for the World Trade Center bombing.

But the "incompetence" narrative soon arrived at its inevitable conclusion: the very agencies that had so signally "bungled" every step along this path were now to be given more money and bestowed more authority to conduct their "counterterror" operations.

BILL CLINTON: This year I'll submit to Congress comprehensive legislation to strengthen our hand in combating terrorists—whether they strike at home or abroad. As the cowards who bombed the World Trade Center found out, this country will hunt down terrorists and bring them to justice.

SOURCE: [*U.S. President William J. Clinton discusses his legislation to combat terrorism in his 1995 State of the Union address*](#)

Others proposed a less-charitable reading of these events. Ron Kuby, the lawyer who, along with William Kunstler, acted as a defense lawyer for the accused bombers and their accomplices, did not mince words in [assigning blame](#) for the World Trade Center bombing plot:

The "mastermind" [of the plot] is the government of the United States. It was a phony, government-engineered "conspiracy" to begin with. It would never have amounted to anything had the government not planned it.

Emad Salem himself summarized the story of the World Trade Center bombing in a phone call with his FBI handler, John Anticev, that was later released to the public.

SALEM: I don't think it was. If that's what you think, guys, fine. But I don't think that because we was start already building the bomb which is [sic] went off in the World Trade Center. It was built by supervising—supervision from the Bureau and the DA and we was all informed about it. And we know that the bomb start to be built. By who? By your confidential informant. What a wonderful, great case!

And then he put his head in the sand and said, "Oh, no no no, that's not true." He is son of a bitch.

OK. It's built with a different way in another place and that's it.

SOURCE: [*1993 WTC Bomb Attack: FBI Informant Emad Salem Tapes*](#)

If this pattern of "missed opportunities" and "miraculous" cross-border movements really had been the result of mere "incompetence" or "inattentiveness," then the resources and attention that were thrown at the problem of international terrorism in the wake of the World Trade Center bombing would have improved the intelligence agencies' record against their erstwhile foes. But, remarkably, the scarcely believable trend of the early 1990s—that of intelligence agencies consistently "missing" the terrorists operating directly under their nose, border agents allowing known terrorists to pass from country to country unmolested, and law enforcement officials letting these Al Qaeda-linked operatives off the hook—did not just continue into the late 1990s, the trend actually accelerated. And, as Al Qaeda went from a loose-knit group of a few dozen amateur *mujahideen* at the beginning of the decade to the premiere international terrorist organization at the end of the decade, the number of "mistakes" and "missed opportunities" multiplied from the merely unbelievable to the downright impossible.

When Mahmud Abouhalima was arrested for his part in the World Trade Center plot in 1993, he [attempted to bargain with federal prosecutors](#). Abouhalima revealed the name of Wadih El-Hage—a Lebanese-born naturalized American citizen living in Texas who the Al Kifah cell had turned to for help in purchasing weapons—and recounted his experiences in Afghanistan with Mohammed Odeh, a Palestinian from Jordan who would [later claim](#) to have provided the rifles and rocket launchers that killed 18 U.S. soldiers and wounded 73 in Mogadishu in October of 1993. Abouhalima then offered more information about the World Trade Center plot and his associates in exchange for a lighter sentence. Prosecutors turned down the deal and failed to follow up on either El-Hage or Odeh.

Ali Mohamed, meanwhile, continued in his remarkably successful mission to infiltrate the intelligence arms of the US government. After having worked for the CIA and served as a special forces instructor at Fort Bragg, his next target was the FBI. Following his honourable discharge from the Army, Mohamed returned to his wife in California and applied to be a translator for the Bureau. He was turned down for the position; instead, he was asked to [work as an FBI informant](#) in a local document forgery ring.

In 1992, the Bureau—evidently impressed with Mohamed's work—["opened" him as a Foreign Counter Intelligence agent](#) and tasked him with gaining intelligence on a San Jose mosque. But Mohamed was assigned to a rookie agent and routine steps like administering a polygraph were never taken. As a retired special agent who worked in the FBI's New York Office later [told journalist Peter Lance](#): "One of the most unbelievable aspects of the Ali Mohamed story is that the Bureau could be dealing with this guy and they didn't put him on the box. The first thing you do with any kind of asset or informant is you polygraph him and if the relationship continues, you make him submit to continued polygraphs down the line. That is a basic principle of running informants."

Still, despite repeatedly traveling back and forth to and from the Middle East throughout the period, Mohamed remained untouchable by law enforcement and border security. In 1992, he was [detained in Rome](#) when he was discovered with a Coca-Cola can containing a secret storage compartment. Mohamed convinced the airport security that he was a security agent for the Summer Olympics in Barcelona and was released with a warning that if anything happened on the flight, he would be blamed.

In 1993, after helping Ayman Al-Zawahiri enter the US on forged documents for a fundraising tour, Mohamed traveled to Vancouver, Canada, to help an associate of Zawahiri, Essam Marzouk, enter the country. Marzouk, caught with forged Saudi passports by Canadian customs officials, was detained by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. When Mohamed arrived inquiring about his friend, he was detained by the RCMP as well. After hours of interrogation, he told them he was an FBI asset, giving them the phone number of his handler, John Zent. Zent's word was good enough. The RCMP let Mohamed go.

Mohamed's travels during this busy period included a trip to Afghanistan in the summer of 1991 to help Osama bin Laden and his fledgling Al Qaeda organization relocate to Sudan.

Osama's move to Sudan came at a time when, we are told, the wealthy Saudi was looking to cement his reputation as a holy warrior. The official story of Al Qaeda holds that during this period, bin Laden [returned briefly to Saudi Arabia](#) but, incensed by the Saudi royals' decision to invite US soldiers onto Saudi soil for the Gulf War, left the country for good.

Searching for a place to move his operations, his gaze turned across the Red Sea to Sudan, where, as luck would have it, hardline Islamic extremist Hassan al-Turabi had come to power in a military coup just as the war was ending in Afghanistan. Heading the National Islamic Front Party, which sought to impose Sharia law in the country, al-Turabi [traveled to London](#) for a meeting of the International Muslim Brotherhood where he openly declared his intention to allow Sudan to act as a base for Islamist terror groups. By the summer of 1991, Osama bin Laden had answered that call, moving his fighters and equipment from the outskirts of Afghanistan to his new base in Sudan with the help of FBI asset Ali Mohamed.

Turabi was not the only one traveling to London to foster his terror plans, however. In between bin Laden's work establishing himself as a businessman in Sudan—using \$12 million granted him by the Saudi Binladen Group to start a bewildering array of commercial enterprises in the country, from a construction company to an investment firm to a trucking business to a tannery, a bakery, a furniture-making business and even a commercial farm employing four thousand labourers—the budding terrorist mastermind was, according to numerous sources, shuttling back and forth between Khartoum, Karachi and London.

Osama bin Laden's visits to the UK in the early 1990s include an [alleged stay](#) at the London estate of Saudi billionaire Khalid bin Mahfouz; a [meeting in Manchester](#) with representatives of an Algerian Islamic group who were [later accused](#) of being infiltrated by government moles and used to launch a series of [false flag attacks in France](#); a period of several months in 1994 when he actually lived in the UK, allegedly buying a house in Wembley through an intermediate; and, even more explosively, a 1996 trip to his London press office which was—[according to](#) Swiss journalist Richard Labeviere, citing "several Arab diplomatic sources"—"clearly under the protection of the British authorities."

Although the official story holds that bin Laden was at this time barely a blip on the US intelligence community's radar, this is contradicted by numerous lines of evidence. Ali Mohamed, for instance, had "volunteered the earliest insider description of al Qaeda that is publicly known" to the FBI in 1993, telling them that bin Laden was "building an army" to overthrow the Saudi government and admitting that he had personally trained terrorists at the camps in Afghanistan and Sudan. But the FBI, [according to *The Wall Street Journal*](#), was "flummoxed" by this information and made no attempt to act on it.

This "news" about Al Qaeda's activities would not have been news to the US government's main intelligence agencies, however. It was [later revealed](#) that, despite claims that the US government was only dimly aware of bin Laden at this point, he was in fact already under extensive electronic surveillance. Having obtained his voiceprint from recordings of his anti-Saddam speeches in Saudi Arabia, the NSA and CIA were already using signals intelligence to identify and monitor Bin Laden's personal satellite calls and cell phone traffic.

In another key contradiction that is never addressed by the purveyors of the official Al Qaeda story, it was during this period that Osama bin Laden—making trips to the UK under the alleged protection of British authorities and while admittedly under surveillance by American intelligence—began the streak of increasingly brazen terror attacks that, we are told, would end up in 9/11.

In 1992, Al Qaeda mounted their [first terror operation](#) against an American target. In December of that year, bombs went off outside two hotels in Aden where, it was believed, American servicemen were being quartered on their way to Somalia for Operation Restore Hope. The attack killed an Australian tourist and a Yemeni hotel worker, but no Americans; the troops had been staying at a different hotel. Osama only claimed responsibility for the bombing six years later.

In 1993, eighteen American soldiers were killed and 73 wounded in Mogadishu during an intense two-day firefight that resulted in the downing of two Black Hawk helicopters by rocket-propelled grenades. It wasn't until the release of the [9/11 Commission Report](#) in 2004, however, that the commission—citing "new information" received by "the intelligence community" in "1996-1997"—told the public that Al Qaeda had had a role in the incident.

The burnishing of bin Laden's terrorist credentials by the US government continued in 1996. In January of that year, the CIA officially opened "Alec Station," a so-called virtual station dedicated solely to tracking Osama bin Laden and his associates. Headed at first by Michael Scheuer—an analyst at the CIA's Counterterrorism Center who had taken a special interest in the Saudi exile—and named after Scheuer's son, Alec Station soon became the hub for a mostly female group of analysts who dubbed themselves "[the Manson Family](#)" because "they had acquired a reputation for crazed alarmism about the rising al-Qaeda threat."

1996 was also the year that the US government began [putting diplomatic pressure](#) on Sudan to hand over their files on bin Laden and his Al Qaeda operatives. The secret negotiations between the two countries culminated with Elfatih Erwa, Sudan's then-minister of state for defense, flying from Khartoum to Washington. There, Erwa made a stunning offer: not to turn over the Sudanese government's *records* on bin Laden, but to turn over bin Laden *himself*. Washington rejected the offer because, *The Village Voice* [later reported](#), "the FBI did not believe it had sufficient evidence to try bin Laden in a US court." Instead, they demanded that Sudan expel the supposed arch-terrorist to "any other country except Somalia." Sudan complied, protesting that Osama would simply return to Afghanistan, where there was no government for Washington to negotiate with. "We told him Sudan is no longer safe for him and creates problems for us and asked him to leave," Erwa told *The Village Voice*.

"We liquidated everything, and he left with his money. We didn't confiscate anything because there was no legal basis. Nobody had indicted him. He rented a charter plane and left in broad daylight. He was free to plot and build his network. The Americans then came back and wanted us to help track him, but by then it was too late. He didn't trust us anymore."

In June of 1996, a truck bomb exploded outside of the Khobar Towers in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. The facility—located in the heart of the Saudi oil industry's administrative area, where the US had built its first air base and where Standard Oil first struck oil in the country, establishing what would later become ARAMCO—was housing US and allied forces involved in enforcing the Iraqi no-fly zones. The massive blast left an 85-foot crater, killing 19 and injuring hundreds.

At the time, the US blamed Tehran for the bombing, with Clinton's Defense Secretary William Perry later [admitting](#) that there was a contingency plan in place to attack Iran if the link had been proven. But by 2007, Perry had changed his assessment:

WILLIAM PERRY: I believe that the Khobar Tower bombing was probably masterminded by Osama bin Laden. I can't be sure of that, but in retrospect, that's what I believe. At the time, he was not a suspect. At the time, all of our examinations, all of the evidence, was pointing to Iran."

SOURCE: [HBO History Makers Series: A Conversation with William J. Perry](#)

One thing is for certain: in 1998, the \$150 million contract to rebuild the Khobar Towers was [awarded to the Saudi Binladin Group](#).

All of these incidents helped raise bin Laden's profile in the intelligence community, but it was a series of events in 1998 that introduced the broader public to Osama bin Laden. In February of that year, bin Laden—following up on a declaration of war against America that he had made to CNN's TV cameras in an [interview with Peter Bergen](#) the previous year—issued [his fatwa](#), calling on Muslims to kill Americans:

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim.

In May of that year, John Miller—then reporting for ABC News, but soon to become the FBI's chief spokesman—traveled to Afghanistan for a dramatic *Nightline* report on "[The Most Dangerous Man You've Never Heard Of](#)" that would air on ABC the following month:

TED KOPPEL: He lives in a cave atop a range of mountains in Afghanistan. From there he controls a web of financial logistical and strategic assistance to Sunni Islamic groups engaged in what they consider a "*ji*had," or a holy war. The principal targets of their *ji*had are the Israelis and the United States. His name is Osama bin Laden, and you will meet him a little later in this program. He does nothing to undermine the profile of himself as a terrorist leader with global influence. Indeed, he seems to take considerable satisfaction in it, even though the profile has been drawn by US intelligence agencies.

[. . .]

OSAMA BIN LADEN (VIA INTERPRETER): We believe that the biggest thieves in the world are Americans and the biggest terrorists on earth are the Americans. The only way for us to fend off these assaults is by using similar means. We do not differentiate between those dressed in military uniforms and civilians; they're all targets in this *fatwa*.

[. . .]

JOHN MILLER: Bin Laden has issued these *fatwas* and made these threats before, but this time there's something different: he put a time cap on it, saying that whatever action will be taken against Americans in the Gulf, whatever violence awaits, will occur within the next few weeks.

SOURCE: [Osama bin Laden: "The Most Dangerous Man You've Never Heard Of" - June 10, 1998 - ABC News Nightline](#)

And, in August of 1998, the name of Osama bin Laden, terror mastermind, and his shadowy terror group, Al Qaeda, finally exploded into the public consciousness.

On the morning of August 7, 1998, two Saudis in Kenya—Mohammed al-'Owhali and "Jihad Ali" Azzam, both of whom had been in the hut when John Miller was interviewing Osama bin Laden earlier that year—loaded some boxes into their Toyota cargo truck and headed off to the American embassy in downtown Nairobi. The boxes contained two thousand pounds of TNT, aluminum nitrate and aluminum powder. At the same time, Hamden Khalif Allah Awad—an Egyptian known as "Ahmed the German" for his fair hair—loaded a similar bomb into a gasoline truck in Tanzania and set off for the American embassy in Dar es Salaam.

The Saudis arrived at the Nairobi embassy at 10:30 AM. 'Owhali jumped out of the truck as it approached the gates, demanding that the security guard raise the drop bar protecting the entrance. The guard refused. 'Owhali threw a stun grenade into the courtyard and ran and then the bomb went off. The blast ripped the face off of the embassy building, collapsing a nearby secretarial college and lighting the tar-covered street and a nearby bus on fire. 213 were dead and 4,500 injured.

Nine minutes later, Ahmed the German parked the gasoline truck in the parking lot of the American embassy in Dar es Salaam and detonated his bomb. He had parked next to a water tanker truck, which ended up absorbing much of the blast, but the building was still badly damaged. 11 were dead and 85 injured.

The message was clear and was dutifully broadcast by media around the world: A "new" terror group had conducted a sophisticated, coordinated attack against multiple US targets overseas and its leader was waging holy war against Americans. Al Qaeda had arrived.

REPORTER: What had happened was the first major attack by al-Qaida on American targets and the worst international terrorist incident on African soil. Afterwards, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation placed al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden on its list of most wanted fugitives.

SOURCE: [*Kenya, Tanzania, US Mark 10th Anniversary of Embassy Bombings*](#)

But, like so many events in the Al Qaeda story, this attack, too, bore the fingerprints of American intelligence on each stage of its development and execution.

The attacks, prosecutors [later discovered](#), were being planned as far back as 1993, when Osama bin Laden sent his FBI/CIA/Green Beret triple agent extraordinaire, Ali Mohamed, "to survey potential U.S., British, French and Israeli targets in Nairobi." According to Mohamed's [own testimony](#):

I later went to Khartoum, where my surveillance files and photographs were reviewed by Osama bin Laden, Abu Hafs, Abu Ubaidah, and others. Bin Laden looked at the picture of the American Embassy and pointed to where a truck could go as a suicide bomber.

[Joining Mohamed](#) on the scouting mission was Anas al Liby, a member of a Libyan Al Qaeda cell known as al-Muqatila. [Described](#) as the "computer wizard of Al Qaeda's hierarchy," not only was al-Liby personally [trained by Mohamed](#) at the Al Qaeda camp in Afghanistan, he was also a protected British intelligence asset. Al-Liby applied for asylum in Britain in 1995, claiming to be a political enemy of the Libyan government. But, as *The Guardian* [later reported](#):

Astonishingly, despite suspicions that he was a high-level Al Qaeda operative, al-Liby was given political asylum in Britain and lived in Manchester until May of 2000 when he eluded a police raid on his house and fled abroad. The raid discovered a 180-page Al Qaeda 'manual for *jihad*' containing instructions for terrorist attacks.

Even more incredibly, not only did the British government grant that asylum, they then recruited al-Liby for a failed MI6 operation to assassinate Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 1996, and then let him continue to live in the country even after the embassy bombing before ultimately letting him escape. According to FBI investigator Ali Soufan, the Manchester raid didn't just nab a "manual for *jihad*"; it caught al-Liby himself. As Soufan recounts in his book, *The Black Banners*, the British police let al-Liby go when he denied being a terrorist. He evaded the team that was sent to follow him and fled the country, eventually ending up on the US government's most wanted list with a [\\$25 million reward](#) for his capture.

Yet another important figure in the bombing who was well-known to American intelligence was Wadih El-Hage, the naturalized American citizen who had assisted the Al Kifah plotters and who Mahmud Abouhalima had identified to prosecutors after his arrest for the World Trade Center bombing. As was later revealed, US intelligence had El-Hage under surveillance during the entire period that the embassy bombing plot was being hatched, but once again merely watched as the attack unfolded. As *The Los Angeles Times* [detailed](#):

The CIA and the FBI missed key opportunities to prevent the blasts. They knew from wiretaps on El-Hage's four Nairobi phones, as well as from the computer files they had seized, that Al Qaeda was forming a terror cell in the Kenyan capital. Indeed, U.S. agents had in hand the names and identities of some of the key Nairobi cell members who would rent the bomb factory, build the bomb, buy the bomb truck, brief the suicide bombers and even escort the bomb truck the day of the attack.

Author Simon Reeve revealed even more damning evidence about CIA involvement in the plot in his 1999 book, *The New Jackals*. "The CIA also had informants working within the east Africa cell," he [reported](#), citing an interview with a CIA official, "but they apparently failed to warn of Bin Laden's plans."

Even if the CIA's sources within the plot had somehow "failed" to warn them of the attack, the fact that multiple members of the cell under their surveillance—including Abdullah Ahmed Abdulah, Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani, Usama al-Kini, Mohammed Sadiq Odeh and five other conspirators—[all fled Kenya for Pakistan](#) the night before the bombing would have instantly raised alarm bells if the agency's intention had been to prevent an attack.

Instead, the plotters conspired with CIA informants in their midst and the attacks went ahead under the watchful eye of CIA, NSA and FBI surveillance.

However they transpired, the bombings succeeded in introducing Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda to the world stage. Despite the years of intelligence agency surveillance and even the creation of a virtual CIA station dedicated solely to the capture, arrest or assassination of bin Laden and his network, it wasn't until after the embassy bombings that the world at large began to hear the name of Osama bin Laden.

On August 20th—three weeks after the bombing and just three days after being publicly interrogated about the Monica Lewinsky affair—President Clinton ordered a missile strike on alleged Al Qaeda targets in Afghanistan and Sudan, boldly proclaiming that actions against bin Laden and international terror had become a new mission for the US military.

CLINTON: Today I ordered our armed forces to strike at terrorist-related facilities in Afghanistan and Sudan because of the imminent threat they presented to our national security. I want to speak with you about the objective of this action and why it was necessary. Our target was terror. Our mission was clear—to strike at the network of radical groups affiliated with and funded by Osama bin Laden, perhaps the preeminent organizer and financier of international terrorism in the world today.

SOURCE: [Statement on Military Strikes in Sudan and Afghanistan \(1998\)](#)

The strike, however—a barrage of 66 Tomahawk cruise missiles targeting Al Qaeda's camp in Khost, Afghanistan and a pharmaceutical plant thought to be manufacturing chemical weapons in Khartoum—was a spectacular failure on almost every level. Neither bin Laden nor Zawahiri were killed in the attacks and the "chemical weapons" plant in Khartoum had nothing to do with either bin Laden or chemical weapons, but was in fact manufacturing much-needed medicines for the region. The plant's destruction—in the [estimation of Werner Daum](#), then Germany's ambassador to Sudan—led to "several tens of thousands" of deaths in the region.

Ayman Al-Zawahiri, bin Laden's longtime associate and future leader of Al Qaeda, was on one of bin Laden's monitored satellite phones at the time of the attack, telling BBC journalist Rahumullah Yusufzai that "Bin Laden has a message. He says, 'I have not bombed the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. I have declared *jihād*, but I was not involved.'" Zawahiri's exact position would have been immediately detectable by American surveillance aircraft in the region, but—in a move that journalist Lawrence Wright [called "inexplicable"](#)—the aircraft were not available prior to the strike, and Zawahiri escaped unscathed.

Bin Laden, meanwhile, was—according to CIA intelligence gleaned from intercepted satellite calls—going to be at his training camp in Khost the day of the missile strike. But he was not. He was, Clinton counterterror czar Richard Clarke [later speculated](#), tipped off about the attack by "a retired head of the ISI," Pakistan's intelligence service that had long been known as an adjunct of the CIA.

The attacks *did* succeed in two key respects, however: they kept Clinton's personal dalliances in the Oval Office from leading America's nightly news broadcasts for at least one news cycle and they reinforced the importance of the new threat to global security: Osama bin Laden.

This "new threat" provided a green light for the American security establishment and its allies around the world to ramp up operations in the name of fighting the Al Qaeda menace. The FBI began an international investigation of the bombing, the CIA began a "surge" of reporting on terror threats that counterterror officials [later complained](#) overwhelmed the system and diverted attention and resources, and in November of 1998 the United States federal court finally issued its [first public indictment](#) of Osama bin Laden.

The [first international arrest warrant](#) for bin Laden—a confidential document intended only for police and judicial authorities—had in fact already been [issued in April of that year](#), but it was not issued by the US. Instead, it was the Libyan government that had issued the warrant through Interpol. They were pursuing the terror mastermind for his part in the murder of two German intelligence agents in Libya in 1994. At the time, despite publicly recognizing bin Laden as the premier financier of international terrorism, the US and British governments [downplayed the document](#), even making sure to scrub the charges against Osama and any mention of Libya's role in issuing the document from the public record.

But this surge in activity around the Al Qaeda threat resulted in at least one surprising development. In one of the most consequential and underreported moves in this redoubled counterterrorism effort, Ali Mohamed was finally arrested.

Contacted in the days after the bombing, Mohamed [admitted to FBI agents](#) that he knew who had carried out the attack but would not give the government the names. Subpoenaed to appear before a grand jury in the Southern District of New York, he was finally arrested, although even the charges against him were [kept secret from the public](#). On October 20, 2000, Mohamed [pled guilty](#) to involvement in the embassy bombings, but he was [never sentenced](#). He then disappeared from sight forever, held in what was later reported as "[protective custody](#)." To this day, there is no public record of Ali Mohamed—the ex-US Sergeant and FBI asset who admitted to his key role in Al Qaeda—ever being sentenced. There is no public record of his incarceration. And there are only a [handful](#) of [accounts](#) that have ever surfaced from people who talked to him in prison in the aftermath of 9/11.

And, just like that, one of the deepest mysteries of the Al Qaeda story disappeared from public sight, never to be seen again.

But, despite all this increased activity, the same pattern of "oversights" and "mistakes" by the intelligence agencies continued unabated.

On October 12, 2000, when a small fiberglass fishing boat approached the massive, 8,300-ton *USS Cole*—a billion-dollar guided-missile destroyer employing the latest stealth technology and armed with Tomahawk cruise missiles, anti-ship and anti-aircraft missiles and a five-inch canon—the sailors onboard watched in amusement. The tiny skiff stopped amidships and two men stood up, waving and smiling. Then, a bomb exploded.

The boat had been carrying over 400 pounds of C4 explosive molded into a shaped charge. The explosion was immense, knocking over cars passing by onshore. In the city, miles away, people believed there was an earthquake taking place. The blast tore a hole forty feet by forty feet in the hull of the *Cole*, killing 17 US servicemen and injuring 39 more. It was the deadliest attack on a US destroyer in over a decade.

But this attack, like all of Al Qaeda's spectacular terror attacks of the 1990s, was preceded by a string of "missed opportunities" and "unheeded warnings." Not only was there intelligence about a potential attack on a US naval ship from several different sources—including [reports from multiple informants](#) and intercepted [phone calls](#) to Al Qaeda's NSA-monitored Yemen communications hub—but, as Congressman Curt Weldon revealed in 2005, a secret military intelligence operation codenamed Able Danger actually warned the Pentagon days before the bombing that an attack was going to take place in Yemen.

CURT WELDON: But two weeks before the attack on the *Cole*—in fact, two days before the attack on the *Cole*—they saw an increase of activity that led them to say to the senior leadership in the Pentagon at that time and the Clinton administration, "There's something going to happen in Yemen and we better be on high alert." But it was discounted. That story has yet to be told to the American people. Another Able Danger successful activity that was thwarted.

SOURCE: [Able Danger: Intel Gag](#)

But even after the spectacular "failure" of these intelligence agencies to thwart the attack, and despite President Clinton's assurance that he would find and retaliate against the bomb plotters . . .

CLINTON: If, as it now appears, this was an act of terrorism, it was a despicable and cowardly act. We will find out who was responsible and hold them accountable.

SOURCE: [President Clinton's Statement on the USS Cole Bombing](#)

. . . the CIA repeatedly denied FBI investigators access to key information about the plot.

But, it turns out, the CIA *did* have such information. And *that* information—deliberately withheld from the FBI or any other investigative agency—led directly into the heart of the operation behind the next spectacular terror attack to be blamed on Al Qaeda: 9/11.

From the beginning, 9/11 was presented to the public as an open-and-shut case. Osama bin Laden's name was raised on air by the TV news anchors within seconds of the second plane strike and was endlessly repeated in the hours and days that followed. By the end of the week, the public was convinced that the events were the work of Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda and all of the subsequent "investigations" and commissions only served to bolster that pre-formed conclusion.

So it was no surprise at all when, on September 14, 2001, the FBI released its [list of nineteen hijackers](#), Muslims with Arabic names who, we were told, had been sent by bin Laden on a suicide mission.

But who were these men?

For the general public, the newscasters' solemn intonation that the nineteen hijackers had been identified, followed by a mugshot-like lineup of photographs, was all that was needed to cement the case in their minds. Those who required more detail turned to made-for-TV dramas and documentaries to learn about the so-called "Hamburg cell" of radicalized Al Qaeda soldiers, which included Mohammed Atta, Ziad Jarrah and Marwan al-Shehhi, three of the alleged suicide pilots. Finally, the 9/11 Commission and its associated monographs—like the staff report on [9/11 and Terrorist Travel](#)—attempted to fill in the paper trail for researchers concerned about the documentary record of these men, including their motivations and their movement.

From these accounts, a picture emerged. These nineteen terrorists, crack operatives handpicked by Osama bin Laden and trained in his terror camps in Afghanistan, had used their carefully honed spycraft to slip into the country, deftly avoiding scrutiny from the authorities even as they trained at flight schools in the US and finalized the operational details of their plan. Then, after years of meticulous preparation, these men, consumed by their hatred of the West, their love of Allah and their devotion to bin Laden—definitely piloted their planes into their targets, wreaking havoc and devastation exactly as planned.

But this story, too, is a carefully constructed lie, every part of which falls apart under sustained scrutiny.

In the official conspiracy theory of 9/11, the alleged hijackers were such devout fundamentalist Muslims that they were willing to give their lives for the cause. Marwan al-Shehhi, we were told, was so devoted to his religious beliefs that he [observed the Ramadan fast](#) against medical advice after a stomach operation, causing him to fall severely ill. Ziad Jarrah, [meanwhile](#), "initially caroused and smoked" during his early days in Hamburg but "then grew intensely religious and withdrawn." And, [according to award-winning journalist Lawrence Wright](#), Mohammed Atta's "extreme rigidity of character" made him into a ruthless killer who "constantly demonstrated an aversion to women."

When reporters began following the trail that these supposed suicide soldiers had left behind, however, they began to uncover an altogether different story. Atta and his associates frequented strip clubs in [San Diego](#), [Las Vegas](#) and [Daytona Beach](#), where they [drank alcohol and ordered lap dances](#). They hung out for days at a time [at Harry's Bar](#) in New York, where Atta [preferred a table near the piano](#). And, three nights before the attack, Atta and al-Shehhi [went to Shuckums Oyster Bar](#) in Fort Lauderdale, where, according to bar manager Tony Amos, they consumed several drinks, became drunk and gave the bartender a hard time about the bill.

"The guy Mohamed was drunk, his voice was slurred and he had a thick accent," Amos [told the Associated Press](#) the day after 9/11.

Even *The New York Times* [reported](#) on Atta and al-Shehhi's "high life" during multiple visits to the Philippines between 1998 and 2000, where the pair of strict religious fundamentalists and an entourage of Arab men and their girlfriends flashed money, drank and partied regularly. "Many times I saw him let a girl go at the gate in the morning," the *Times* quoted one hotel chambermaid as recalling about Atta. "It was always a different girl."

And, during his research for [Welcome to Terrorland](#)—an investigation into the Venice, Florida, flight schools where Mohammed Atta, Marwan al-Shehhi and Ziad Jarrah were enrolled in the year 2000—Daniel Hopsicker interviewed Amanda Keller, a former stripper who [claimed to have been Atta's girlfriend](#) during his time in Venice and who shared more stories about the partying of these alleged *jihadis*.

AMANDA KELLER: These guys had money flowing out their ass—excuse my language. But they never seemed to run out of money. I mean they were just tossing money left and right. I mean, it was just like, 'Oh my God!' And they had they had massive supplies of cocaine. Whenever they'd run out, they'd go to the flight school.

SOURCE: [*Mohamed Atta Girlfriend Amanda Keller*](#)

But Hopsicker's investigation uncovered more than just the alleged hijackers' trail of booze, drugs and women. He also became one of the only reporters to look into the strange connections of Huffman Aviation and the Florida Flight Training Center in Venice, Florida, where Atta, al-Shehhi and Jarrah trained the year before September 11th. Huffman Aviation was also the flight school that Yeslam bin Laden, Osama's half-brother, [paid for flight lessons](#) for one of his acquaintances.

The flight school was run by Rudi Dekkers, a Dutch native who was [running a commuter airline with Wally Hilliard](#). Hilliard—the founder and former president of a Green Bay, Wisconsin-based insurance company—made news in October 2000 when his personal jet was found to be [transporting 42 pounds of heroin](#) and was seized by federal agents in what was called the [biggest drug bust in central Florida history](#). But Hilliard's charter airline start-up had high-level political support: Jeb Bush, then Governor of Florida, [posed for photo ops](#) in support of Hilliard's airline.

Dekkers, meanwhile, was [arrested in 2012](#), having told an undercover agent—in the words of the [criminal complaint against him](#)—that he was "involved in narcotics transportation via private aircraft and that he has flown narcotics and U.S. currency previously without any problems." He was carrying over 18 kilograms of cocaine and nearly one kilogram of heroin [at the time of his arrest](#).

Despite the many questions that still hang over the alleged hijackers' activities in Venice and their connection to the drug-running that was allegedly taking place at the Venice airport, an even deeper question was soon to emerge: How did these pilots—who were rated as competent at best and who, [one instructor insisted](#), should have been further along the flight school curriculum than they were—manage to fly jumbo jets that require thousands of hours of flying experience with such precision?

That question is even more important in the case of the other alleged 9/11 pilot, Hani Hanjour, the diminutive 5'5" Saudi who, the official story tells us, helped overpower grizzled Navy Top Gun honor graduate Chuck Burlingame and his flight crew at the controls of American Airlines Flight 77. According to that story, Hanjour allegedly flew a Boeing 757 with what aviation sources for *The Washington Post* described as "extraordinary skill" through a 7,000-foot spiral descent to hit the Pentagon, a move that veteran airline pilot Ed Soliday [told the 9/11 Commission](#) would be "tough for any airline pilot, including himself," and which left one radar operator at Dulles Airport [stunned](#): "The speed, the maneuverability, the way that he turned, we all thought in the radar room, all of us experienced air traffic controllers, that that was a military plane."

But Hanjour, by all accounts, was a [completely inept pilot](#). He dropped out of his first flight school, the Sierra Academy of Aeronautics, after only a few classes. He then dropped out of his next school, Cockpit Resource Management in Scottsdale, Arizona, after the school's owner dismissed him as a "weak student" who was "wasting our resources." When he returned to that school again the following year, the school owner refused, asserting: "You're never going to make it." An instructor at his next school, Sawyer Aviation, called him a "neophyte" who "got overwhelmed with the instruments" in the school's flight simulator. An instructor at his *next* school [concurred](#): Hanjour had "no motivation, a poor understanding of the basic principles of aviation, and poor judgment, combined with poor technical skills."

After [bypassing the FAA](#) to obtain a commercial pilot's license from a for-profit contractor, the operation manager at yet another flight school in the Phoenix area, Peggy Chevrette, [told Fox News](#) that Hanjour was

clearly unqualified to be in the cockpit: "I couldn't believe that he had a license of any kind with the skills that he had." Even *The New York Times* conceded that the remarkable flight attributed to Hanjour on 9/11 was inexplicable. In an article headlined "[A Trainee Noted For Incompetence](#)," the paper quoted one former flight school employee who knew Hanjour as saying: "I'm still to this day amazed that he could have flown into the Pentagon. He could not fly at all."

Whatever the case, what would eventually become the official explanation for this seeming incongruity—namely, that the single engine aircraft training and jet simulation training that they had received was good enough for these men to jump into the cockpit of commercial jet airliners and pilot them hundreds of miles to their targets—was rejected in the first hours of the attack as completely implausible.

COURIC: And meanwhile they *did* spend seven months at this flying school in Venice, according to these records. And although they were not trained to fly jets, do people believe that what they learned there is easily transferrable to, say, a 757 or a 767?

SANDERS: Actually, no, they don't say it's easily transferrable, because it's such a different type of jet. But, nonetheless, they got that initial training in Venice, Florida. Whether their training continued elsewhere—you have to assume it took place somewhere else. Where they learned it, though, at this point, I don't know and the FBI hasn't told us.

COURIC: Alright . . .

SOURCE: [September 12, 2001 - 11:49am EDT on WRC](#)

A [Newsweek story](#) of September 15, 2001, provided one potential answer to this puzzle. According to a "high-ranking US Navy source" cited by the report, "[t]hree of the alleged hijackers listed their address on drivers licenses and car registrations as the Naval Air Station in Pensacola," and, according to a separate "high-ranking Pentagon official," another of the alleged hijackers "may have received language instruction at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio." But this report—like the subsequent reports of people with the same name as the alleged hijackers turning up alive and well in the wake of 9/11, which [prompted the FBI to apologize](#) to one mistakenly named suspect and forced FBI Director Robert Mueller to [acknowledge](#) that they were not certain of the identities of several of the named men—were eventually dismissed as mere confusion over common Arab names.

On September 28, 2001, the FBI released the [final list of names and photographs](#) of the alleged hijackers, and this rogues' gallery of fearsome Al Qaeda operatives was cemented in the public imagination.

So who *were* these nineteen men? If they really were who the FBI said they were, who directed them? How were they supposed to have entered the United States? How did they fund their operations? And how did they evade detection while living openly in the US for months and in some cases years?

In the months after the attacks, we [were told](#) that the men identified by the FBI as the culprits had "moved through Europe and America unnoticed" and that although several of them "had been tracked by intelligence until they got inside the United States," they were ultimately "lost."

We [were told](#) that Al Qaeda's communications *had* been monitored, but that bin Laden and his henchman used "scramblers, Internet encryption, fiber optics" so it was "very hard" to intercept those transmissions.

And we were told that no one was to blame for the attacks, which had merely been a "failure of imagination."

THOMAS KEAN: As we detail in our report, this was a failure of policy, management, capability, and above all, a failure of imagination.

SOURCE: [*September 11 Commission Report Release*](#)

But, as the public was to learn in bits and pieces over the course of the next two decades, every one of these assertions was a demonstrable lie.

This alleged team of crack Al Qaeda operatives did *not* "move through Europe and America unnoticed." Their communications were *not* rendered opaque to the intelligence agencies because of "fiber optics." Their successful penetration of America's defenses was *not* due to a "failure of imagination."

Instead—as even the official story of the attacks now concedes—*every* major branch of US intelligence had key pieces of information on these Al Qaeda operatives, their communications, their movements and their plans. In fact, as can now be shown from official sources, these agencies not only deliberately allowed these operatives to proceed unmolested but actively stopped investigators and agents within their ranks from blowing the whistle on the plot.

At the FBI, Special Agent Robert Wright led an investigation into terrorist financing called [*Vulgar Betrayal*](#) that managed to uncover a money trail connecting a suspected Chicago terror cell to Al Qaeda. But when Wright attempted to bring criminal charges against the cell members, his supervisor flew into a rage, [*shouting*](#): "You will not open criminal investigations. I forbid any of you. You will not open criminal investigations against any of these intelligence subjects."

After the embassy bombings, when Wright's team began to trace the financing of the attacks to a group of Saudi businessmen, the FBI moved to shut down the investigation altogether. Wright was kicked off the case in 1999, and *Vulgar Betrayal* was officially shut down in 2000.

ROBERT WRIGHT: Knowing what I know—and again, this was written 91 days before the attack—knowing what I know, I can confidently say that until the investigative responsibilities for terrorism are removed from the FBI, I will not feel safe.

SOURCE: [*9-11 FBI Whistleblower Robert Wright Testimony*](#)

While Wright was pursuing the financial trail, FBI field agents across the US were picking up on another trend: Muslim extremists learning to fly.

Agents in [*Oklahoma*](#) and [*Phoenix*](#) both wrote memos about the "large numbers of Middle Eastern males receiving flight training" and warned that some of them had documentable ties to Al Qaeda, but the warnings were ignored. Agents in Minneapolis frantically sought approval for a search warrant to search the laptop of Zacarias Moussaoui, a suspected terrorist who had been receiving flight training in the area.

When that request was denied, one exasperated agent [*told FBI headquarters*](#) that he was "trying to keep someone from taking a plane and crashing into the World Trade Center." Rita Flack, an intelligence operations specialist at headquarters who had read the Phoenix memo, failed to pass *that* info on to any of her colleagues involved in the decision to deny the warrant to search Moussaoui's laptop.

FBI whistleblower Colleen Rowley later [*revealed*](#) that agents in the Minneapolis office—desperately trying to find an answer to the question of why the Bureau was deliberately sabotaging the case—faced the problem with [*gallows humour*](#): "I know I shouldn't be flippant about this, but jokes were actually made that the key FBIHQ

personnel had to be spies or moles, like Robert Hansen, who were actually working for Osama bin Laden to have so undercut Minneapolis' effort."

The Pentagon's intelligence branch, meanwhile, not only had foreknowledge of the plot, but—according to information that emerged years later and was quickly suppressed—had identified four of the presumed terror operatives and mapped out the network connecting them to the Brooklyn cell headed by the Blind Sheikh.

"Able Danger" was a classified information operations campaign against transnational terrorism launched by military intelligence in the fall of 1999. First [revealed to the public](#) in June 2005, Able Danger employed data mining techniques on open source and classified information to identify networks of likely terror agents, including those operating in the US.

The program was remarkably successful: not only did it warn the Pentagon of an impending attack just days before the *Cole* bombing, as we have already seen, but, according to Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) whistleblower Lt. Col. Anthony Shaffer and four of his colleagues working on the operation, Able Danger identified two of the terror cells connecting Al Qaeda to the alleged hijackers. It even [identified four of those suspects](#)—including Mohamed Atta—by name.

When Lt. Col. Shaffer tried to set up a meeting between his supervisor and FBI officials in Washington to discuss a collaborative approach to tracking these cells, he was rebuffed by lawyers for the Pentagon's Special Operations Command. Shortly thereafter, Shaffer was ordered off the Able Danger team and the unit was disbanded, with the [Pentagon ordering all the Able Danger data](#)—2.5 terabytes worth of information, equivalent to one quarter of all the printed material in the Library of Congress—destroyed.

After a hostile investigation that left witnesses feeling intimidated into changing their story about Able Danger *still* found five Pentagon employees who said they *had* seen the organizational chart with Atta's name on it, the Department of Defense Inspector General [concluded](#) that Able Danger had never identified Atta or any other alleged hijacker. And, just two months after the story became public—including Shaffer's revelation that he had met with 9/11 Commission Executive Director Philip Zelikow and told him all of the details of the program in an extensive hour-long debriefing in Afghanistan that did *not* find its way into the Commission's final report—the DIA stripped Shaffer of his security clearance, essentially ending his decades-long career as a military intelligence officer.

WELDON: Mr. Speaker, this is not some third-rate burglary cover-up. This is not some Watergate incident. This is an attempt to prevent the American people from knowing the facts about how we could have prevented 9/11, and people are covering it up today! And they're ruining the career of a military officer to do it, and we can't let it stand!

SOURCE: [Curt Weldon House Session October 19, 2005](#)

The NSA, meanwhile—despite the "scrambler and fiber optics" excuses of the agency's apologists—were monitoring all of the communications going through Al Qaeda's pivotal Yemen communications hub from the lead-up to the Embassy bombings straight through to the execution of 9/11 itself. This "communications hub"—discovered in 1996 when the NSA began tapping into and transcribing the satellite phone calls of bin Laden—was, in fact, the [home of Ahmed al-Hada](#), one of the *jihadis* who had fought alongside bin Laden against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Hada's phone was used by various Al Qaeda-linked operatives to pass messages to each other, as some countries blocked or monitored calls to other countries as possible terrorist communications.

The NSA listened as Mohamed al-'Owhali, one of the bombers involved in the embassy attack, [made multiple calls to the hub](#) before and after the attack. They listened as Al Qaeda operatives called the hub to discuss

attacking a US warship in the months prior to the *Cole* bombing. And they listened as numerous terror suspects called to discuss their operations with Khalid al-Mihdhar, one of the alleged 9/11 hijackers and the [son-in-law of Ahmed al-Hada](#).

Thomas Drake was a decorated United States Air Force and United States Navy veteran with a background in military crypto-electronics who had worked for twelve years as an outside contractor at the NSA. 9/11 was his first full day as an employee of the agency, and it was in the wake of that attack that he was handed a report from one of his colleagues in the NSA's "CounterTerror Shop" that laid out the agency's role in the events of that day.

[According to Drake](#), the report was "an extraordinarily detailed long-term study of Al Qaeda's activities" that identified "the planning cells" for 9/11, including "a number of the hijackers based on actual copy: Atta, Hazmi, Mihdhar," all of whom had appeared on the NSA's radar by the start of 2001. It also contained specific warnings about 9/11.

Drake immediately gave the document to his supervisor, Maureen Baginski, who told him: "Tom, I wish you had not brought this to my attention." He was subsequently forced out of his position, stripped of his security clearance and [indicted under the Espionage Act](#).

On the day of the attacks, knowing the information that the NSA had that could have foiled the plot, the analysts began to break down. Two staffers suffered heart attacks, with one dying. Another, a female analyst who had been responsible for monitoring the Yemen hub communications, left NSA headquarters after suffering what Drake was told was a nervous breakdown. Yet another, a 40-something man, began openly crying in a hallway, telling three women he was talking to in full view of everyone passing: "We knew this was being planned months ago, but they would not let us issue the reports we wrote."

NSA leadership, however, like Drake's supervisor and the head of the SIGINT division, Maureen Baginski, had a different reaction to the events unfolding that morning.

THOMAS DRAKE: I would hear the following phrase, which I think one person in particular probably regrets ever saying more publicly, that 9/11 was a gift to NSA. A gift.

SOURCE: [*Thomas Drake: '9/11 Became a Profit Center' for the NSA*](#)

In fact, the story of intelligence agency foreknowledge of the plot goes from the merely impossible to the outright absurd when it is revealed that it wasn't just US intelligence that had a window into the plot, but every major intelligence service in the world.

In subsequent years, it has [emerged](#) that intelligence agencies in [Indonesia](#), the [UK](#), [Germany](#), [Italy](#), [Egypt](#), [Russia](#), [Jordan](#), [France](#) and, of course, [Israel](#) had all passed on various warnings about an imminent attack in the months and years leading up to 9/11.

And, infamously, the President received a [classified intelligence briefing](#) on August 6, 2001, that unequivocally stated that an attack *was* being prepared.

RICHARD BEN-VENISTE: Isn't it a fact, Dr. Rice, that the August 6th PDB warned against possible attacks in this country? And I ask you whether you recall the title of that PDB?

CONDOLEEZZA RICE: I believe the title was, "Bin Laden Determined to Attack Inside the United States."

SOURCE: [*Excerpts from April 8, 2004 Testimony of Dr. Condoleezza Rice Before the 9/11 Commission Pertaining to The President's Daily Brief of August 6, 2001*](#)

It's no surprise that this plot—the most important ever attempted by Al Qaeda—would have been known by so many. Not only did the men that (we are told) bin Laden handpicked for the operation make no effort to hide their movements or obscure their activities, they instead—in the words of some investigators—left a deliberate trail behind them, a trail that was picked up and extensively reported on in the immediate wake of the attacks.

NARRATOR: Customs inspectors at Dubai airport became suspicious when they noticed that Jarrah had pasted a page of the Koran into his passport. When they searched his luggage, they discovered piles of radical Muslim propaganda. What he did next remains a mystery to terrorism experts worldwide: he talked freely about his future plans.

SOURCE: [*The 9/11 Hijackers: Inside The Hamburg Cell*](#)

ANCHOR: One possible clue has developed in Florida. A car was towed from the Daytona Beach airport to this impound lot near Daytona. An airport worker called police because the car had photographs of Osama bin Laden in the back seat.

SOURCE: [*September 12, 2001 - 12:01pm EDT on WUSA*](#)

KERRY SANDERS: . . . and that's why they geared up the FBI agents in the field immediately, and they located him in South Florida, and again over on the West coast of Florida in Venice—

KATIE COURIC: Were they surprised, Kerry, that he wasn't traveling under an assumed name?

SANDERS: I think they are, but clearly from what the indications are at this point these terrorists are not hiding after the fact or anything like that. I think that—one of the agents told me that what he believes is that they wanted to leave this trail.

SOURCE: [*September 12, 2001 - 11:49am EDT on WRC*](#)

Perhaps the greatest clue as to the real nature of the 9/11 operation, however, is found in one of the most stunning pieces of evidence of direct intelligence agency complicity in the plot. In the years after the attack, it was revealed that the CIA were not just surveilling the supposed hijackers or gathering information on their plans; they actively stopped information about these men's travels from reaching other intelligence agencies, deliberately hiding the fact that two of these agents had entered the US and were openly living in the country from the FBI and even from the National Security Council itself for over one and a half years.

This incredible fact, buried in [footnote 44 of chapter 6](#) of the 9/11 Commission report, was no trivial detail.

9/11 Commission chair Thomas Kean called it "one of the most troubling aspects of our entire report."

White House counterterror czar Richard Clarke said that it is evidence of both CIA malfeasance and misfeasance.

And Mark Rossini, an FBI agent assigned to the CIA's bin Laden unit, believed it to be part of a secret intelligence operation involving these supposed terrorist hijackers that the agency didn't want anyone to discover.

MARK ROSSINI: You know, the Agency had an obligation to tell the Bureau about these individuals, and in particular when it was determined that they did go on to the U.S., that they did travel to America. I think they had some sort of operational plan going on they didn't want the Bureau to know about.

SOURCE: [Who Is Rich Blee?](#)

Shortly after the *Cole* bombing, Fahad al-Quso, a Yemeni with known links to Osama bin Laden, was interrogated by Yemeni agents and admitted that he had flown from Yemen to Bangkok the previous January to deliver \$36,000 to "Khallad," a terrorist based in Malaysia who Quso identified as the bombing mastermind. The money, Quso said, was to buy this one-legged terror mastermind an artificial leg.

But Ali Soufan—the head of the FBI investigation into the *Cole* bombing—was [puzzled by this lead](#). Why was Al Qaeda transferring money *out* of Yemen when they were supposedly planning an attack *in* that country? Was this money for a different operation?

As with every such lead, Soufan followed up with an official request to the CIA for any information they had on "Khallad" in Malaysia or the phone number that Quso had used to contact him there. The CIA never responded to any of these official requests.

But Soufan's intuitions were correct.

On December 29, 1999—with all of the US intelligence services on heightened alert due to the threat of millennium terror attacks—the NSA [shares information](#) from their wiretap of Al Qaeda's Yemen communications hub with the CIA: Khalid Al-Mihdhar, Nawaf Alhazmi, and Salem Alhazmi will be flying to Malaysia to attend an important Al Qaeda summit the following month. The CIA, already aware of Al-Mihdhar's connection to the Yemen communications hub, tasks agents from eight CIA offices and six friendly foreign intelligence services with tracking his travel to Malaysia.

The surveillance operation is successful. When Al-Mihdhar changes planes in Dubai, the CIA [obtains a copy](#) of his passport. Inside is a vital piece of information: this known bin Laden associate, on his way to an Al Qaeda summit, has a [visa to enter the United States](#). A visa that was issued at the same Jeddah consulate where, Michael Springmann testified, the CIA was helping to secure visas for Osama bin Laden's men during the Afghan-Soviet war.

Seasoned intelligence officials have no trouble understanding the importance of this fact. Reflecting on the incredible nature of this series of events years later, veteran FBI agent Jack Cloonan [remarked](#):

"How often do you get into someone's suitcase and find multiple-entry visas? And how often do you know there's going to be an organizational meeting of Al Qaeda any place in the world? The chances are slim to none! This is as good as it gets. It's a home run in the ninth inning of the World Series. This is the kind of case you hope your whole life for."

What happened next is so inexplicable for purveyors of the official 9/11 conspiracy theory that it is typically never discussed.

After scoring this once-in-a-lifetime intelligence coup—this "home run in the ninth inning of the World Series"—the CIA then failed to watchlist either Al-Mihdhar or Alhazmi, allegedly lost track of them after they went on from Malaysia to Thailand (despite having the phone number of the hotel where they stayed in Bangkok) and failed to inform FBI investigators like Ali Soufan that these known terror associates had been tracked to an Al Qaeda summit. Most incredibly of all, the official record shows that supervisors in the CIA's bin Laden unit repeatedly and deliberately stopped agents from sending info about Al-Mihdhar's US visa to the FBI.

On January 5, 2000, while the summit was still underway in Kuala Lumpur, the CIA's Riyadh Station forwarded the information about Al-Mihdhar's visa to Alec station at Langley. Doug Miller—an FBI officer assigned to the bin Laden unit as part of an intelligence-sharing program between the CIA and the FBI—read the cable and,

following protocol, immediately drafted a memo asking for permission to forward the info to FBI headquarters. The reply from Miller's CIA supervisor, [Michael Anne Casey](#), citing Alec Station's deputy chief, Tom Wilshire, was immediate and unequivocal: "This is not a matter for the FBI."

Thus began an 18-month odyssey in which 50 CIA personnel documentably accessed this information and not one of them ever officially shared it with any FBI or National Security Council official, even then-counterterrorism czar Richard Clarke.

CLARKE: You understand, the way they update us at the White House is: every morning, I come in, I turn on my computer and I get 100, 150 CIA reports. I'm not relying on somebody calling me and telling me things. You have to *intentionally* stop it. You have to intervene and say, "No, I don't want that report to go," and I never got a report to that effect.

SOURCE: [Interview #07 \(Washington, DC\)](#)

On its own, this is scarcely believable. The Central Intelligence Agency actively and deliberately made a decision to stop the automatic sharing of information on the most sensitive national security intelligence in their possession.

On September 12, 2001, when the CIA finally granted Ali Soufan's request from nearly one year before and sent him their intelligence about the Malaysia meeting, he began visibly shaking and rushed to the bathroom, vomiting on the floor next to the toilet. When one of his colleagues asked him what had happened, [he said](#): "They knew, they knew."

But neither Soufan nor anyone else familiar with the hidden history of Al Qaeda should be surprised. When put into its context, this episode is a perfectly predictable continuation of the same pattern of intelligence agency aid that, as we have seen, defines the story of Al Qaeda.

It is sometimes said that in order to be successful in their mission, the intelligence agencies have to get everything right all the time whereas the terrorists only have to get lucky once. But the Al Qaeda "terrorists"—protected, shepherded and aided by the intelligence agencies, as they demonstrably were—did not get lucky *once*.

They got lucky over and over and over again, time after time after time, year after year after year, from their earliest beginnings through their development and growth, through their rise to international prominence, through every major terrorist attack of the 1990s and right up to the doorstep of 9/11.

At this point, the "incompetence" theory of "failures" and "missed opportunities" is not only not supportable, it is a transparent falsehood. There is only one conclusion possible: These "terrorists" were deliberately aided.

This is not fringe conspiracy thinking. Even Richard Clarke eventually came to this conclusion.

CLARKE: For me, to this day it is inexplicable why, when I had every other detail about everything related to terrorism, that the director didn't tell me, that the director of the Counterterrorism Center didn't tell me, that the other 48 people in CIA who knew about it never mentioned it to me or anyone in my staff in a period of over 12 months.

JOHN DUFFY: They were stopped from getting to you and stopped from getting to the White House.

CLARKE: And stopped from getting to the FBI and the Defense Department. We therefore conclude that there was a high-level decision in the CIA ordering people not to share that information.

RAY NOWOSIELSKI: How high level?

CLARKE: I would think it would have to be made by the director.

[. . .]

DUFFY: Have you asked George Tenet or Cofer Black or Richard Blee about any of this after the fact?

CLARKE: No.

NOWOSIELSKI: It kind of—the facts dripped out to you over time, right? Over these investigations? And then you started to—

CLARKE: It took a while.

NOWOSIELSKI: Yeah.

DUFFY: You've never approached them . . . ?

NOWOSIELSKI: You used to be kind of buddies with Tenet, right? So . . .

CLARKE: Look at it this way: they've been able to get through a joint House investigation committee and get through the 9/11 Commission and this has never come out. They got away with it. They're not going to tell you even if you waterboard them.

SOURCE: [*Interview #07 \(Washington, DC\)*](#)

That the former top-ranking counterterrorism official in the United States has publicly accused the former director of the CIA and other top CIA officials of running an operation involving the accused 9/11 hijackers and then covering up that operation and information about it up to and through 9/11—an incredible accusation recorded by two independent filmmakers and freely viewable on YouTube for the past decade—is apparently of so little importance that it has never been followed up on by any major media outlet.

But Clarke's version of the story, explosive as it is—that these accused terrorists really *were* terrorists, that they, like Ali Mohamed, managed to triple-cross the intelligence agencies that were trying to use them as double agents against Al Qaeda, and that the highest ranks of those intelligence agencies, up to and including the director of the CIA engaged in a cover-up of the entire affair, indirectly allowing 9/11 to take place purely to save their own skin—demonstrably cannot be the full story.

As we now know, these nineteen men were no devout Islamic fundamentalists driven by their devotion into striking against the infidels. These alcohol-drinking, strip club-attending bumbleres who, at one point, lived with an FBI informant and who left what investigators described as a deliberate trail behind them, were *not* master spies capable of triple-crossing the CIA.

They did *not* coordinate their plan to coincide precisely with the live-fly hijacking exercises, military war games and planes-into-buildings training drills that were [taking place on the day of 9/11](#).

They did *not* overpower the military-trained pilots on four separate planes before a single one of them could so much as send out a hijack signal.

They did *not* know to commit those hijackings precisely in the [highly classified radar gaps](#) that made their planes' movements opaque to flight traffic controllers.

They did *not* pilot those planes through maneuvers that even experienced pilots called "tough for any airline pilot" despite never having sat in the cockpit of a jumbo jet before.

They did *not* cause three buildings to pulverize themselves in mid-air, falling directly through the path of most resistance at freefall gravitational acceleration with two planes.

They did *not* decide to fly around the Pentagon to miss the Defense Secretary's office and instead hit the section of the building where [bookkeepers and budget analysts](#) were working on the problem of the \$2.3 trillion that Donald Rumsfeld had just 24 hours earlier [admitted](#) could not be accounted for in the Defense Department's budget.

They did *not* commit the informed trading that three separate academic studies have proven *did* take place in the run up to 9/11.

They did *not* engage in the decades-long cover-up of these facts in the wake of that attack.

And they did *not* launch the war of terror that sometimes saw the US and its allies using Al Qaeda as a convenient excuse for aggression in foreign countries and other times saw them actively collaborating with Al Qaeda to achieve their geopolitical goals.

No. Richard Clarke's story is itself a cover-up. The spectacular, catalyzing terror attack of 9/11 was not *allowed* to happen. It was *made* to happen.

But why? Who, other than the devout Muslim suicide warriors posited by the official 9/11 conspiracy theorists, would do such a thing? And for what purpose?

To answer these questions, we need to return to Operation Susannah and the false flag terror ruse that has been employed by the British, the Israelis and the US throughout the past century. As we shall see, just eight years after Operation Susannah failed in Egypt, the highest-ranking officials in the US military drafted plans to stage terror attacks, blow up airliners and even kill Americans in order to blame their political enemies. And, in the lead up to 9/11, a cadre of political operatives brought those plans into the 21st century, paving the way for a new Pearl Harbor that would begin a worldwide war of terror and a clash of civilizations.

GEORGE W. BUSH: Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.

SOURCE: [President Bush's address to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001](#)

TO BE CONCLUDED...

Part Three: The War of Terror

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[CLICK HERE](#) for a German translation of this video

TRANSCRIPT

"Falsehood flies, and truth comes limping after it, so that when men come to be undeceived, it is too late; the jest is over, and the tale hath had its effect."

Jonathan Swift

INTRODUCTION

Kabul, Afghanistan. August 29th, 2021.

A white 1996 Toyota Corolla races down the dusty streets of the Afghan capital.

Just days earlier, a suicide bombing at the Kabul airport had killed thirteen US Marines and dozens of Afghans. American forces, on high alert, track the Corolla from above. An American MQ-9 Reaper drone hovers high up, monitoring the driver—Zemari Ahmadi—as he stops at a suspected ISIS safe house and loads the car with explosives before continuing his journey to the airport.

But Ahmadi never reaches his destination. At 4:50 PM, the order is given and the Reaper drone launches a hellfire missile at the vehicle, killing the would-be terrorist and destroying his explosive payload.

The media, focused on the conflict in Afghanistan for the first time in years, air live coverage of the Pentagon's announcement: In the waning hours of America's two-decade-long military presence in Afghanistan, another terror threat has been liquidated and more innocent lives have been saved.

GEN. WILLIAM TAYLOR: Yesterday, US military forces conducted an over-the-horizon counterterrorism operation against an ISIS-K planner and facilitator. The air strike occurred in the Nangarhar province of Afghanistan. I can confirm, as more information has come in, that two high-profile ISIS targets were killed and one was wounded and we know of zero civilian casualties.

SOURCE: [*Military officials hold news conference at Pentagon after drone strike*](#)

But as the smoke cleared on the scene of the strike, some [grisly truths](#) began to emerge: Ahmadi had *not* been a terrorist. He was *not* on his way to set off a suicide bomb at the Kabul Airport. The car didn't even have explosives.

In reality, Ahmadi had been an aid worker for an American NGO distributing food to malnourished Afghans. He wasn't on his way to the airport; he was arriving home after a day at the office. The "suspicious packages" that the drone operators had watched him load into his car were in fact water bottles that Ahmadi was bringing home because his neighbourhood was dealing with a water shortage.

In perhaps the greatest irony, Ahmadi had applied for a special visa to emigrate to the US with his family just days before his death. Now, that family was devastated, torn apart by an explosion that left Ahmadi and nine of his relatives—including a two-year-old—dead.

Finally forced to admit that every part of the drone strike story had been a lie, the Pentagon called it a "[tragic mistake](#)." And, after a three-month self-investigation, it was decided that [no one involved in that "mistake" would receive any punishment](#) for killing 10 innocent Afghans.

The story of the killing of Zemari Ahmadi is the story of the War on Terror in a nutshell. Ahmadi's death was cast as a "tragic mistake" for which no one was to blame, just as America's decades-long debacle in the Middle

East—from the invasion, occupation and eventual chaotic retreat from Afghanistan to the illegal invasion of Iraq and the rise of ISIS to the regime change operations in Libya and Syria—had been a "failure" of military planning.

But, when viewed in its proper context, the war on terror was no failure. In fact, waged on fictitious grounds against a shadow enemy, the great military campaign of the 21st century was not a war on terror at all. It was a war *of* terror, a pretext for the construction of an international security grid in the name of fighting a bogeyman that never existed in the first place.

And by *that* metric, the war *of* terror was successful beyond its planners' wildest dreams.

Part Three: The War of Terror

For many in the general public, the war on terror was a direct consequence of 9/11, and that war began with George W. Bush's address to Congress on September 20, 2001:

GEORGE W. BUSH: Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them. Our war on terror begins with Al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.

SOURCE: [*President Bush's address to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001*](#)

Some even believe that the war ended with Barack Obama's declaration of May 23, 2013:

BARACK OBAMA: Beyond Afghanistan, we must define our effort not as a boundless "global war on terror," but rather as a series of persistent, targeted efforts to dismantle specific networks of violent extremists that threaten America.

SOURCE: [*Remarks by the President at the National Defense University*](#)

But, as convenient as these statements are for creating bookends for the story of the war on terror, they do *not* tell the real story of that war. In fact, the origins of the global war on terror go back much further than the general public has been led to believe.

In 1962, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, led by General Lyman Lemnitzer, issued a startling proposal to President John F. Kennedy on how to get the public on board with military invention in Cuba to remove Fidel Castro from power. Called [Operation Northwoods](#), the plan suggested a number of staged provocations, secretly committed by the US itself but blamed on Castro, including: blowing up a US ship in Guantanamo Bay and blaming the incident on the Cuban government; staging terror attacks in the United States to be blamed on Cuban terrorists; and even painting up a remote-controlled plane to resemble a passenger jet and destroying it over Cuba.

The incredible plan, rejected by Kennedy, who subsequently refused to renew Lemnitzer's term as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was classified and was [not revealed to the public until 2001](#), just months before 9/11.

JAMES BAMFORD: The idea was to create a pretext to show that there was an attack by Cuba on the United States. And the idea was to have US personnel from the CIA and other places secretly create terrorism in the United States. The document actually said people would be shot on American streets, bombs would be blown up. And again, all this the evidence would be laid to point the finger at Castro.

One other idea was they were going to—they had a very complex plan where they were going to take an aircraft and load it with CIA people that looked like college students, fly it over to—have it take off from an airport in

Miami with a lot of publicity and then it would—quickly after it got into the air—land at a secret CIA base. At that same time, an identical plane would take off from that CIA base, except this plane would be empty and it would be remotely piloted from the ground. It would be a drone plane that would be very similar to the passenger plane that had just taken off.

And once the plane was over Cuba, there was going to be a tape recorder that would have played a distress call to a microphone saying, "Help, we're being shot at!" And a few minutes later—once the plane was over the Caribbean Sea after it passed over Cuba—somebody would have pressed the button on the ground, blowing up the plane. And they would have blamed Cuba for killing a plane load of American college students.

SOURCE: [*Operation Northwoods explained by James Bamford*](#)

But even after its rejection, the Northwoods idea of using spectacular terror attacks as the justification for a widescale war continued to be employed by military planners.

In November 1998, Philip Zelikow—who would go on to chair the 9/11 Commission—co-wrote an article in *Foreign Affairs*, the Council on Foreign Relations' publication, with Ashton Carter, the future Secretary of Defense under President Obama, and John Deutsch, the former director of the CIA. Titled "[Catastrophic Terrorism: Tackling the New Danger](#)," the article warns of a potential "transforming event," such as an attack on the World Trade Center:

"Like Pearl Harbor, the event would divide our past and future into a before and after. The United States might respond with draconian measures scaling back civil liberties, allowing wider surveillance of citizens, detention of suspects and use of deadly force. More violence could follow, either future terrorist attacks or U.S. counterattacks. Belatedly, Americans would judge their leaders negligent for not addressing terrorism more urgently."

The solution to this impending threat of catastrophic terrorism, Zelikow and his co-authors argue, is to take that threat seriously—as the US government did in 1940 when it "pondered what kind of forces it would need to wage a global war"—and to create new offices for coordinating homeland security and waging pre-emptive strikes against potential terrorists around the world.

Then, unnoticed by much of the public, the global war on terror was first proposed on live TV on the morning of 9/11. At 11:28 AM New York time, as the blanket of dust from the freshly exploded towers was still settling on Manhattan and much of the world was still trying to process what was happening, a guest on BBC World News laid out the dawning of the new age of global terror with remarkable foresight. But this prediction was not delivered by a US government official or an American intelligence agent or a Washington Beltway insider. It was delivered by Ehud Barak, the former Prime Minister of Israel.

PRESENTER: Joining me now here in the BBC World studio is the former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who's in London at the moment. Mr. Barak, welcome to BBC World. First, your reaction, having heard what's happened. At least four planes have been hijacked and there may be more.

EHUD BARAK: The world will not be the same from today on. It's an attack against our whole civilization. I don't know who is responsible. I believe we will know in 12 hours.

If it *is* a kind of bin Laden organization, and even if it's something else, I believe that this is the time to deploy a globally concerted effort led by the United States, the UK, Europe and Russia against all sources of terror—the same kind of struggle that our forefathers launched against the piracy on the high seas.

SOURCE: [September 11, 2001 - 11:28am EDT \(4:28pm BST\) - BBC World News](#)

In the chaos of September 11, 2001, mere minutes after the destruction of the Twin Towers, the global viewing public was presented all the key takeaways of 9/11: that "this is the time to deploy a globally concerted effort led by the United States"; that "the world will not be the same from today on"; and, of course, that we "don't know who was responsible," although "we will know in 12 hours." But the name immediately implanted in the minds of the audience—not for the first nor the last time on that long day of news coverage—was that of Osama bin Laden.

In the following days, these takeaways became the talking points for the US government and its allies around the world. Before the day was over, President Bush was already laying the rhetorical groundwork for the coming war, vowing that "[we stand together to win the war against terrorism](#)." By the end of the week, the American public was being prepared for a conflict much bigger than a conventional war: "[This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while](#)."

And, in the following week, Bush confirmed what the public had been told since the moment of the live televised strike on the World Trade Center:

JON SCOTT: We just saw on live television as a second plane flew into the second tower of the World Trade Center. Now, given what has been going on around the world, some of the key suspects come to mind: Osama bin Laden. Who knows what?

SOURCE: [Original News Broadcast on 9/11/01](#)

BUSH: Americans are asking: Who attacked our country? The evidence we have gathered all points to a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations known as Al Qaeda.

SOURCE: [President Bush's address to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001](#)

By the end of the month, the public had heard so many authoritative pronouncements about "the evidence" pointing to bin Laden's responsibility for the 9/11 attacks that few noticed when the US government declined to release a [promised white paper](#) outlining that evidence—a decision prompted by a "[lack of solid information](#)" about the plot, according to government sources cited by veteran journalist Seymour Hersh. Instead, the presentation of such evidence was outsourced—as so much of the dirty work in the global war on terror would be—to a third-party nation-state: the United Kingdom.

On September 30, 2001, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair appeared on the BBC's [Breakfast with Frost](#) program to declare he had been shown "absolutely powerful, incontrovertible evidence of [bin Laden's] link to the events of the 11th of September," but because the evidence came from "sensitive sources" he could not simply reveal it to the public. Rather, the UK government would release a report laying out its case against Osama in great detail.

That dossier, titled "[Responsibility for the terrorist atrocities in the United States](#)," was released on October 4th and was [touted by the press](#) as "the clearest case yet of Osama bin Laden's involvement in the September 11 attacks." The document opens, however, by noting that it "does not purport to provide a prosecutable case against Osama bin Laden in a court of law." The first 60 points of the report provide general background information about bin Laden and previous terror attacks attributed to Al Qaeda, and the last ten points, dealing with "Osama bin Laden and the 11 September attacks," are almost incomprehensibly vague.

It claims that "at least three" of the hijackers have been identified as "associates of Al Qaeda," without listing how this conclusion was arrived at or even who these associates are.

It claims that the attack "follows the modus operandi" of Al Qaeda and is "entirely consistent" with the planning of previous attacks attributed to the group.

And, most remarkably, it states that "[t]here is evidence of a very specific nature relating to the guilt of bin Laden and his associates that is too sensitive to release."

At almost the exact same time, momentous events were taking place in Europe, where the North Atlantic Council, NATO's main decision-making body, was receiving a classified briefing from a US State Department operative.

LORD ROBERTSON: This morning, the United States briefed the North Atlantic Council on the results of their investigation into who was responsible for the horrific terrorist attacks which took place on 11 September.

The briefing was given by Ambassador Frank Taylor, the United States Department of State Coordinator for Counter-terrorism.

[. . .]

The briefing addressed the events of 11 September themselves, the results of the investigation so far, what is known about Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda organization and their involvement in the attacks and in previous terrorist activity, and the links between Al Qaeda and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

The facts are clear and compelling. The information presented points conclusively to an Al Qaeda role in the 11 September attacks.

SOURCE: [*Statement by NATO Secretary General, Lord Robertson, October 2, 2001*](#)

This was no ordinary briefing. The result of that briefing was that for the first time in its history, NATO invoked Article 5 of [its charter](#)—the self-defence clause that compels the organization to assist any member nation that is attacked by an outside force. By "proving" that bin Laden had committed the attack in connection with the Taliban, the United States could launch the war on terror and compel NATO to assist in its invasion of Afghanistan.

LORD ROBERTSON: On the basis of this briefing, it has now been determined that the attack against the United States on 11 September was directed from abroad and shall therefore be regarded as an action covered by Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which states that an armed attack on one or more of the Allies in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all.

I want to reiterate that the United States of America can rely on the full support of its 18 NATO allies in the campaign against terrorism.

Given the stakes involved, questions long swirled around this mysterious, classified briefing. What had Ambassador Frank Taylor told the North Atlantic Council that was so compelling? What information persuaded the world's largest and most powerful military alliance to launch an invasion of another nation? The public, it seemed, would never know.

LORD ROBERTSON: Today's was a classified briefing and so I cannot give you all the details. Briefings are also being given directly by the United States to the Allies in their capitals.

But then, in 2009, intelwire.com quietly posted [a document](#) online under the title "[Secret Post-9/11 Briefing to World Leaders](#)." The document is a US State Department cable addressed to the American embassies in the NATO countries and American allies around the world under the subject line "September 11: Working together to fight the plague of global terrorism and the case against Al Qaeda." The cable is dated October 1, 2001—the day before Ambassador Taylor's meeting with the North Atlantic Council—and instructs its recipients to brief

their host country's government on "the information linking the Al Qaeda terrorist network, Osama bin Laden, and the Taliban regime to the September 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon and the crash of United Airlines Flight 93."

The document went largely unnoticed until 2018, when Professor Niels Harrit wrote an article, "[The Mysterious Frank Taylor Report: The 9/11 Document that Launched US-NATO's 'War on Terrorism' in the Middle East](#)," connecting the dots between this document and the briefing that Ambassador Taylor gave to the North Atlantic Council.

HARRIT: This is in my mind with no doubt simply the legal basis for eighteen years of perpetual war in the Middle East. This is the basis for NATO's activation of Article 5. And so what is in the document and what is the evidence? What is the evidence which Lord Robertson calls "clear and compelling"? None. There's absolutely no evidence in that paper.

SOURCE: [*The Secret Lie That Started the Afghan War*](#)

Much like the UK government dossier, the State Department cable contains no actual evidence of a link between bin Laden and the 9/11 attacks. In fact, the cable is virtually identical to the UK report. After spending a full fifteen pages talking in generalities about terror, about the US government's officially sanctioned history of Al Qaeda, and of previous attacks attributed to Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, the document finally arrives at "Part III" purporting to demonstrate Al Qaeda's involvement in the attacks.

But Part III begins by admitting that the investigation into the attacks is "still in the early stage" and that "[t]here are still gaps in our knowledge." It then goes on to detail circumstantial "evidence," including the observation that "bin Laden and his associates seemed to be anticipating what we could only identify as an important event or activity." Finally, the document talks about how the incident is "tactically similar to earlier attacks" because it involved planning and a desire to inflict mass casualties.

And with *that* complete lack of evidence, the war on terror was launched and the invasion of Afghanistan began.

And so, in October 2001, the bombs began dropping on Afghanistan. The war of terror had officially begun, and the public was told that one of the key objectives of that war was to kill or capture Osama bin Laden.

REPORTER: Do you want bin Laden dead?

BUSH: I want him . . . hell, I want justice. And there's an old poster out West, as I recall, that said "Wanted: Dead or Alive."

SOURCE: [*CNN: 2001, President George W. Bush 'bin Laden, Wanted dead or alive'*](#)

But as we have seen, one of the defining hallmarks of Al Qaeda throughout its reign of terror was its agents' uncanny ability to cross borders illegally, evade capture repeatedly and generally slip through intelligence agency dragnets unimpeded. This remarkable string of "good luck" included:

- the "Blind Sheik" Omar Abdel Rahman, who entered the US with CIA support and lived there unmolested even after his green card was revoked;
- World Trade Center bomber Ramzi Yousef, who entered the US without the proper paperwork, working and living with a suspected terror ring that was under FBI surveillance, and fleeing the country before he was even a person of interest in the WTC investigation;
- Khalid Al-Mihdhar and Nawaf Alhazmi, whose entry to the US from an Al Qaeda summit in Malaysia was known about and actively covered up by the CIA and who lived openly in the United States under

their real names for over a year, repeatedly calling the Al Qaeda communications hub in Yemen that was being monitored by the NSA;

- and, most infamously, Al Qaeda "triple agent" Ali Mohammed, whose career as an Egyptian army officer, a "failed" CIA asset, a trusted aide to Al Qaeda second-in-command Ayman Al-Zawahiri, a US special forces training officer, a volunteer fighter in Afghanistan, an FBI deep-cover asset, Osama bin Laden's personal bodyguard and the trainer of many of Al Qaeda's terrorists throughout the 1990s is so improbable that it is generally ignored in most histories of Al Qaeda.

As incredible as all of those stories are, however, they pale in comparison to the story that was about to unfold: the "disappearance" of Osama bin Laden, ostensibly the most wanted man on the planet, from under the noses of the American military and intelligence services.

Osama bin Laden's remarkable post-9/11 "disappearance" actually began on 9/11 itself, when his whereabouts were not a mystery to America or its allies in the region. In fact, his location and activities on the night before 9/11 were well known to the US, although that information would not be revealed to the public until after his "escape."

BARRY PETERSEN: Everyone remembers what happened on September 11th. Here's the story of what may have happened the night before. It is a tale as twisted as the hunt for Osama bin Laden.

CBS News has been told that the night before the September 11th terrorist attack, Osama bin Laden was in Pakistan. He was getting medical treatment with the support of the very military that days later pledged its backing for the US war on terror in Afghanistan. Pakistan intelligence sources tell CBS News that bin Laden was spirited into this military hospital in Rawalpindi for kidney dialysis treatment.

SOURCE: [*Dan Rather Reports: 9/11 bin Laden At Rawalpindi Hospital September 10th 2001*](#)

Despite knowing bin Laden's precise location and activities right up to the moment of 9/11, however, and despite the fact that the Al Qaeda leader was already a wanted fugitive subject to [international arrest warrants](#) and [under indictment by a US federal court](#), bin Laden continued to move around internationally with the full knowledge and complicity of state intelligence services. And, as remarkable as this may seem, bin Laden's trip to Rawalpindi on the eve of 9/11 was neither the first nor the last time that the US would allow him to evade capture.

In the weeks after the attack, the Taliban offered to [try bin Laden in Afghanistan](#) or even hand him over to a third-party country if the US provided them with the same proof of Bin Laden's guilt for 9/11 that Ambassador Taylor had supposedly provided NATO. Bush [turned the offer down](#). Then, after the invasion of Afghanistan began in October, the Taliban again [tried to hand bin Laden over](#), this time dropping the request for proof of his guilt. [Bush again refused](#).

The war of terror, it turned out, was not about getting Osama. In fact, if bin Laden *had* been captured or killed, it would have derailed the carefully laid plans for the Bush Administration's aggressive new foreign policy.

But, having been sold on the simplified version of the war on terror—the one that held the objective of that war was to kill or capture Osama bin Laden and to liquidate the Al Qaeda network—the public believed that the fighting would be short and decisive, like the first Gulf War. After all, how hard would it be for the army of the world's unrivaled military superpower employing the tools of the most high-tech intelligence community in history to capture a lone fighter on dialysis in the caves of Tora Bora?

Bush administration officials were quick to temper the public's expectations on this point. This was no ordinary elderly man living in an undefended cave, after all. This was a comic book supervillain, an evil millionaire mastermind directing a terrorist army from his elaborate cave fortress.

TIM RUSSERT: . . . there is constant discussion about him hiding out in caves, and I think many times the American people have a perception that it's a little hole dug out of a side of a mountain.

DONALD RUMSFELD: Oh, no.

RUSSERT: This is it. This is a fortress! A complex, multi-tiered. Bedrooms and offices on the top, as you can see. Secret exits on the side and on the bottom. Cut deep to avoid thermal detection. A ventilation system to allow people to breathe and to carry on. The entrances large enough to drive trucks and even tanks. Even computer systems and telephone systems. It's a very sophisticated operation.

RUMSFELD: Oh, you bet. This is serious business. And there's not *one* of those, there are *many* of those!

SOURCE: [*Bin Laden's cave according to Rumsfeld*](#)

This was a lie, of course. There were no high-tech cave fortresses, no "multi-tiered bedrooms and offices on the top," no "secret exits on the side," no ventilation system or computer systems. It was a fabrication, a literal artist's rendering with as much reality as that of a comic book or a cartoon.

But, as an unfolding drama for the public following the war on their television sets half a world away, this story had enough twists and turns to keep any audience engaged.

The first phase of the war went as predicted. By November, America's relentless bombing had already routed the Taliban, driving them from Kabul toward Kunduz in the north. There, the trapped fighters—including not only Taliban but Al Qaeda members as well as Pakistani Army officers, intelligence advisers, and volunteers—were saved from certain defeat by a miracle: the arrival of a squadron of Pakistani aircraft that flew in and airlifted them back to Pakistan.

It was later [confirmed](#) that the operation—dubbed the "[airlift of evil](#)"—was signed off on by the Bush Administration, who had cut a secret deal with Pakistani President Musharraf to let the fighters escape and who "ordered the United States Central Command to set up a special air corridor to help insure the safety of the Pakistani rescue flights."

But what about Osama bin Laden? As it turns out, his whereabouts were no great mystery to American forces, and, once again, he was allowed to escape.

On the eve of the invasion of Afghanistan in October, the *Guardian* [reported](#) that "Osama bin Laden was in Kabul last week and US and British intelligence agencies have a 'pretty good idea' where he is now," suggesting that "Western intelligence has a much clearer picture of bin Laden's recent movements than has been admitted." The report went on to note that bin Laden's "capture or death would reduce the pressure for wider military action against Afghanistan." But this intelligence did not lead to bin Laden's apprehension.

As American forces honed in on Kabul in early November, bin Laden and all of his closest advisors managed to escape to Jalalabad in a very conspicuous late-night convoy. One eyewitness [reported](#): "We don't understand how they weren't all killed the night before, because they came in a convoy of at least 1,000 cars and trucks. It was a very dark night, but it must have been easy for American pilots to see the headlights."

On November 13th, just one day before the Northern Alliance captured Jalalabad, bin Laden escaped once again, this time in a convoy of [several hundred cars](#). Despite believing bin Laden to be in one of the vehicles, US forces opted to ignore the convoy and instead bombed the nearby Jalalabad airport.

Bin Laden and his men, now numbering a few hundred fighters, arrived in mid-November at the mountainous Khyber Pass on the border of Pakistan. On November 15th, with the remaining Al Qaeda and Taliban holdouts pinned down in the caves of Tora Bora, the US military was in a position to eliminate the Al Qaeda threat, kill Osama bin Laden and end the war on terror.

But, remarkably, the Marines, special forces and CIA operatives who were positioned and ready to do this were blocked from doing so by their own superiors.

NARRATOR: That winter, the CIA was still at war. The Taliban had fallen. Now it was Osama bin Laden's turn.

GARY BERNTSEN: I'm looking for bin Laden right away. I want to start killing him and his people immediately.

GARY SCHROEN: We had intelligence that continued to develop that bin Laden and Zawahiri were in Afghanistan, probably in the eastern areas, hiding out there.

NARRATOR: The CIA tried to put together a team to chase bin Laden. It wasn't easy.

GARY BERNTSEN: I asked Army special forces if they'll send people in. They say, "No, we're not going down there. It's unstable. You don't have a reliable ally."

STEVE COLL: The conditions for Al Qaeda's retreat were quite favorable, and the United States did not do the one thing that the Pentagon had within its power to do, which was to move regular US troops into a blocking position behind these mountains.

SOURCE: [*The Dark Side \(Frontline\)*](#)

The story, exhaustively documented by [CIA operatives](#), [special forces operators](#), [journalists](#) and even a [US Senate report](#), is clear and unambiguous.

As the US Senate report notes: "By early December 2001, bin Laden's world had shrunk to a complex of caves and tunnels carved into a mountainous section of eastern Afghanistan known as Tora Bora."

Both the CIA and Delta Force—the US Army's elite special operations unit—had tracked bin Laden from Jalalabad to Tora Bora. They had "real-time eavesdropping capabilities on Al Qaeda almost from their arrival, allowing them to track movements and gauge the effectiveness of the bombing" and were able to pick up radio communications featuring bin Laden directly issuing commands to his troops. They had him surrounded on three sides, and the relentless air strikes—including the use of a 15,000 pound "daisy cutter" not used since Vietnam—were decimating what was left of bin Laden's forces. All that was needed was to secure the mountain pass leading out of Tora Bora and into Pakistan.

Gary Berntsen, the head of the CIA's paramilitary operation against the Taliban and Al Qaeda, knew that the Afghan militias that the US had cobbled together were not up to the job of securing the pass. From mid-November to mid-December, he repeatedly begged his superiors for one battalion of US Army Rangers—just 800 troops—to help stop bin Laden from slipping away.

As the US Senate later noted, fulfilling Berntsen's request "would have been a manageable task":

In late November, about the time US intelligence placed bin Laden squarely at Tora Bora, more than 1,000 members of the 15th and 26th Marine Expeditionary Units, among the military's most mobile arms, established a base southwest of Kandahar, only a few hours flight away. [...] Another 1,000 troops from the Army's 10th Mountain Division were split between a base in southern Uzbekistan and Bagram Air Base, a short helicopter flight from Tora Bora.

General James Mattis, the commander of the Marines at Kandahar, told a journalist that his troops could seal off Tora Bora, but his superiors rejected the plan.

Berntsen fared no better in his quest to obtain 800 Army Rangers for the mission. Not only was his request rejected, but, remarkably, in the middle of the most important battle of the war, he was replaced as head of the CIA force in Afghanistan, effective immediately. His replacement was to be Rich Blee, the same CIA bin Laden unit chief who had helped conceal the information about Al-Mihdhar and Alhazmi's entry to the US from the FBI. Blee was accompanied to Afghanistan by Michael Anne Casey, the bin Laden unit staffer who had actually stopped Doug Miller from sharing that info with the FBI.

At first, Berntsen was told that his request was denied because it might "alienate our Afghan allies."

"I don't give a damn about alienating our allies!" he [replied](#). "I only care about eliminating Al Qaeda and delivering bin Laden's head in a box!"

Later, though, a different story emerged. As it turns out, at the exact same time that bin Laden was holed up in Tora Bora, US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld ordered General Tommy Franks, who was leading the Afghan invasion, to redirect planning resources from Afghanistan to the Pentagon's next target in the war of terror: Iraq.

As even the official story of the war on terror acknowledges, bin Laden and his top aides, seizing their opportunity, simply walked out of Tora Bora and into Pakistan.

And, just like that, the bogeyman of the war on terror was gone, allowed to escape yet again. He would reappear from time to time to continue reminding the public about the origins of the terror war. But now, the public's attention was being turned to a new bogeyman.

QUESTION: Mr. President, in your speeches now, you rarely talk [about] or mention Osama bin Laden. Why is that?

Also, can you tell the American people if you have any more information—if you know if he is dead or alive. Deep in your heart, don't you truly believe that until you find out if he is dead or alive, you won't really want to make—

BUSH: Well, deep in my heart, I know the man's on the run if he's alive at all. And I—you know, who knows if he's hiding in some cave or not? We hadn't heard from him in a long time.

And the idea of focusing on one person is really—indicates to me people don't understand the scope of the mission. Terror's bigger than one person. And he's just—he's a person who has now been marginalized. His network is—his host government has been destroyed. He's the ultimate parasite who found weakness, exploited it, and met his match.

He is—you know, as I mention in my speeches—I do mention the fact that this is a fellow who is willing to commit youngsters to their death. And he, himself, tries to hide, if, in fact, he's hiding at all.

So I don't know where he is. Nor—you know, I just don't spend that much time on him really, to be honest with you.

SOURCE: [*Presidential News Conference March 13, 2002*](#)

BUSH: Some have argued that confronting the threat from Iraq could detract from the war against terror. To the contrary, confronting the threat posed by Iraq is crucial to winning the war on terror.

SOURCE: [*President Bush Outlines Iraqi Threat*](#)

That the Bush Administration would pivot so quickly from hunting Osama bin Laden to toppling Saddam Hussein was only surprising to those who did not know the neocons populating the Bush administration or their well-documented and long-held desire to affect regime change in Iraq.

In 1996, a group of prominent neoconservatives—including Richard Perle, Douglas Feith and David Wurmser—wrote a report for then-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Titled "[A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm](#)," the report urged Israel to "shape its strategic environment" by "weakening, containing, and even rolling back Syria." The way to do this, the report concluded, was to "focus on removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq—an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right—as a means of foiling Syria's regional ambitions."

In 1997, twenty-five prominent neocons—including ten who would go on to serve in the Bush Administration, and even Jeb Bush, the future president's brother—signed a "[Statement of Principles](#)" as the founding charter of a new think tank called the Project for the New American Century (PNAC). The statement called on then-President Clinton to reverse the defense spending cuts that marked the post-Cold War era and to "increase defense spending significantly." In 1998, the group followed up with an [open letter to Clinton](#) urging him to "turn your Administration's attention to implementing a strategy for removing Saddam's regime from power."

Surrounding himself with neocons on the campaign trail and eventually installing those neocons in all of the key security positions in his cabinet, President George W. Bush wasted no time in making these regime change dreams a reality.

As Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill [later revealed](#), at his first major national security council meeting—held just ten days into the new administration—"President Bush tasked Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Hugh Shelton to begin preparing options for the use of US ground forces in the northern and southern no-fly zones in Iraq to support an insurgency to bring down the Saddam regime." The second national security council meeting of the Bush administration, held two days later, [also discussed regime change in Iraq](#), with one briefing document at the meeting marked "secret" and [bearing the title](#) "Plan for post-Saddam Iraq."

RON SUSKIND: From the very first instance, it was about Iraq, it was about what we can do to change this regime.

LESLEY STAHL: Now, everybody else thought that grew out of 9/11.

SUSKIND: No.

STAHL: But this book says it was day one of this administration.

SUSKIND: Day one, these things were laid and sealed.

SOURCE: [*Before 9/11, Bush Asked To "Go Find Me A Way" To Invade Iraq*](#)

And, infamously, on the day of 9/11 itself, the administration was already beginning plans for a retaliatory strike not just on bin Laden in Afghanistan but on Iraq.

A note taken at 2:40 PM on September 11, 2001, [records Rumsfeld saying](#) he wanted "best info fast. Judge whether good enough to hit Saddam Hussein at the same time. Not only bin Laden." He also made sure to order staff to "go massive" and "sweep it all up" including "things related and not."

From before Bush even got into office, there was no doubt that he would attack Iraq. 9/11 and the war on terror merely presented the neocons with the perfect opportunity to fulfill that agenda. The only problem was how to tie Iraq into the war on terror in the minds of the public, a problem that Bush himself admitted to.

BUSH: You know, one of the hardest parts of my job is to connect Iraq to the war on terror.

SOURCE: [*Couric Interview Bush September 6, 2006*](#)

BUSH: Of course we're after Saddam Hussein . . . I mean bin Laden. He's . . . he's . . . he's isolated.

SOURCE: [*George W. Bush and John Kerry 1st Presidential Debate 2004*](#)

The job of connecting the public face of the war on terror—bin Laden and Al Qaeda—to Saddam and Iraq was made more difficult by the fact that there was no such connection. Difficult, but not impossible, for a committed cadre with no qualms about using mendacity to achieve their political objectives.

The most direct link between Al Qaeda and Iraq was a trip that alleged 9/11 hijacker Mohammed Atta was reported to have made to the Iraqi consulate in Prague in April 2001. After Atta's pictures were published in the media in the wake of 9/11, a Middle East informant told Czech intelligence that he had seen Atta meeting with a suspected Iraqi intelligence agent in the Czech Republic that spring.

The story became even more salacious when—at the height of the anthrax scare in October 2001—"anonymous Israeli intelligence sources" planted a story in the German media that Atta had in fact [received anthrax spores](#) from his Iraqi contact in Prague.

But the entire story was such a preposterous lie that it was quickly disowned by both [the FBI](#) and [the CIA](#). Investigators found "there was no evidence Atta left or returned to the US" during that time frame and "pointed to other evidence, including Atta's cell phone records, to cast doubt on the idea that any meeting had occurred." And, despite the fantastical, anonymous, evidence-free reports in German media, the anthrax used in the anthrax attacks on America in the fall of 2001 did not source from Iraq, but from the US military's [own bioweapons laboratory](#).

None of this stopped Vice President Dick Cheney from [repeating the lie](#) in his media appearances in the run-up to the Iraq War, however.

CHENEY: We've seen, in connection with the hijackers, of course, Mohamed Atta, who was the lead hijacker, did apparently travel to Prague on a number of occasions. And on at least one occasion, we have reporting that places him in Prague with a senior Iraqi intelligence official a few months before the attack on the World Trade Center.

SOURCE: [Cheney on "Meet the Press" September 8, 2002](#)

The story of Iraqi agents handing flasks of anthrax to 9/11 hijackers was a little too fanciful even for the credulous American public, however, and it was soon [dropped from the neocons' sales pitch](#) for the Iraq war.

Instead, a different set of lies would need to be found to sell the public on the illegal invasion of a sovereign nation.

On January 31, 2003—six months after senior British intelligence [complained behind closed doors](#) that the "facts were being fixed around the policy" of invading Iraq—Bush met with British Prime Minister Tony Blair at the White House for a discussion on the matter. As a [now-infamous](#) memo documenting the meeting records, Bush had already decided on military action, and a start date for the bombing of March 10th "was now pencilled in." Given that it was unlikely that the UN would pass a resolution authorizing the invasion absent some compelling incident, Bush suggested a way that Iraq could be provoked into aggressive action.

[According to the memo](#): "The US was thinking of flying U2 reconnaissance aircraft with fighter cover over Iraq, painted in UN colours. If Saddam fired on them, he would be in breach" of existing UN resolutions, thus justifying military action. The stunning and documented admission that President Bush had suggested staging a false flag event as one option for provoking a war received some press attention at the time but has since largely been forgotten.

After all, they did not need to get Iraq to shoot down a spy plane. The neocons had hit on a different strategy for selling the war to the public.

PRESIDENT BUSH: If the Iraqi regime wishes peace, it will immediately and unconditionally forswear, disclose and remove or destroy all weapons of mass destruction.

SOURCE: [President Bush at United Nations General Assembly 2002](#)

COLIN POWELL: One of the most worrisome things that emerges from the thick intelligence file we have on Iraq's biological weapons is the existence of mobile production facilities used to make biological agents.

SOURCE: [Colin Powell's Speech at the UN 2003](#)

CHENEY: He now is trying, through his illicit procurement network, to acquire the equipment he needs to be able to enrich uranium to make the bombs—

RUSSERT: —Aluminum tubes.

CHENEY: Specifically, aluminum tubes. There was a story in *The New York Times* this morning . . .

SOURCE: [Cheney on "Meet the Press" September 8, 2002](#)

RICE: The problem here is that there will always be some uncertainty about how quickly he can acquire nuclear weapons. But we don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud.

SOURCE: [Condoleezza Rice on CNN Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer September 8, 2002](#)

As these drawings, based on their descriptions, show, we know what the fermenters look like. We know what the tanks, pumps, compressors and other parts look like. We know how they fit together. We know how they work. And we know a great deal about the platforms on which they are mounted.

SOURCE: [Colin Powell's Speech at the UN 2003](#)

BUSH: And my message to Saddam Hussein is that, for the sake of peace, for the sake of freedom, you must disarm like you said you would do. But my message to you all, and to the country, is this: for the sake of our future freedoms, and for the sake of world peace, if the United Nations can't act, and if Saddam Hussein won't act, the United States will lead a coalition of nations to disarm Saddam Hussein.

SOURCE: [Remarks by the President at South Dakota Welcome October 31, 2002](#)

As decades of after-the-fact journalism has exhaustively documented, every aspect of the "Weapons of Mass Destruction" story was a transparent and admitted lie. But it was a remarkably successful lie. Six months into the Iraq war, [a stunning 82%](#) of the American public believed that Saddam Hussein had "provided assistance" to Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda, and 69% believed that Saddam was personally involved in the September 11th attacks.

As the months wore on, however, it became harder to hide the fact that the mythical WMD stashes and mobile weapons labs and aluminum tubes that the public had been assured were keys to the "imminent threat" posed by Saddam's regime simply weren't there. Even the corporate press that had worked so hard to sell these lies to the public had to start pointing out the obvious: the Bush administration had lied in order to sell an illegal invasion of a sovereign country to the American public and to the people of the world.

The neocons realized that a renewed effort was going to be needed to connect Iraq to the war on terror in order to keep the public on board with the war as the invasion of Iraq morphed into the occupation of Iraq. And, as always, the Al Qaeda threat would serve the purpose of terrifying the public into rallying once again behind their government. The fact that Iraq and Al Qaeda were mortal enemies might have been an insurmountable obstacle to anyone concerned with the truth. But these were neocons. Their logic was simple: if the Al Qaeda bogeyman didn't exist in Iraq, they would have to create it. So that's exactly what they did.

Founded in Jordan in 1999, even the official history of the terrorist organization that became known as "Al Qaeda in Iraq" acknowledges that the group originally had nothing to do with either Al Qaeda or Iraq. Instead, its founder, Ahmed al-Khalaylah, was a Jordanian militant whose terror cell *Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad*, or "Congregation of Monotheism and Jihad," was dedicated to the overthrow of the Jordanian monarchy.

Like many of the figures in the Al Qaeda story, the [biography of al-Khalaylah](#) is not that of a devout Muslim, let alone a dedicated *jihadi*. A high school dropout, al-Khalaylah was known for [drunken brawls and drug dealing](#) and was [jailed for sexual assault](#) before going to Afghanistan to join the Mujahideen in 1989, just as the Soviets were leaving. From there, the story of this soon-to-be-feared terrorist leader tells us he returned to Jordan "a few years later," founded a terror cell known as Jund al-Sham that attracted the attention of the authorities, and was sent to prison in 1992 where he "adopted more radical Islamic beliefs."

After his release from the Jordanian prison in 1999, he immediately became involved in a new plot to bomb the Radisson SAS Hotel in Amman and several tourist sites in Jordan just before New Year's Day 2000. The plot was foiled, and al-Khalaylah fled through Pakistan to Afghanistan, where, we are told, he met with bin Laden and other Al Qaeda leaders, with whose assistance he set up a terrorist training camp for Jordanian militants in Herat.

Joining the resistance to the US invasion after 9/11 and adopting the *nom de guerre* Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, he fled to Iran in January 2002. His whereabouts and activities during 2002 are "difficult to pin down" but "Western and Arab intelligence agencies" [assured The Washington Post](#) that, despite being a known terror operative and wanted by numerous governments, Zarqawi, like many other Al Qaeda figures, "moved frequently and with relative ease among Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, expanding his network."

Then, in 2003, still a relative unknown even within the world of militant *jihad*, Zarqawi turned up in Baghdad, where he was catapulted to international infamy not by his actions, nor by the promotion of Osama bin Laden or other *jihadis*, but by the US government.

POWELL: But what I want to bring to your attention today is the potentially much more sinister nexus between Iraq and the al-Qaida terrorist network, a nexus that combines classic terrorist organizations and modern methods of murder. Iraq today harbors a deadly terrorist network headed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, an associate and collaborator of Usama bin Laden and his al-Qaida lieutenants.

SOURCE: [*Remarks to the United Nations Security Council*](#)

The remarks, delivered during Colin Powell's infamous speech justifying the forthcoming invasion of Iraq to the UN Security Council in February of 2003, were—like most of the specific accusations in the address—demonstrably false. Zarqawi was a relative nobody in Iraq at the time; the CIA [later admitted](#) there was no evidence that Hussein had been "harboring" him; and his group was not, in fact, affiliated with Al Qaeda when Powell made his speech.

Nevertheless, these falsehoods started to become true after the spotlight of attention was showered on Zarqawi by the US State Department.

Attacks attributed to or claimed by Zarqawi were relatively few, but received inordinate amounts of attention from the international press. These attacks were often designed to inflame Shia/Sunni hatred, thus turning resistance to the occupation into a full-on sectarian conflict that tore the country to its roots.

And in 2004, Zarqawi—who, we are told, calculated that attaching the Al Qaeda brand name to his group would give it more caché in the *jihadi* world—pledged his allegiance to Osama bin Laden and received the Al Qaeda title "Emir of Al Qaeda in the Country of Two Rivers." The specter of Al Qaeda in Iraq—just another cynical and calculated lie when used by Powell to justify the Iraq invasion—had become a reality.

What resulted from this US government-promoted character was a career so remarkable that it could only be believed in a Hollywood action movie . . . or a history of Al Qaeda.

In 2004, after being allegedly caught and freed by Iraqi security forces in the Fallujah area because "[they didn't realize who he was](#)," Zarqawi was then [reportedly killed](#) in an American bombing raid in northern Iraq in March before pledging his allegiance to Osama and [officially joining Al Qaeda in October](#).

In 2005, Zarqawi was, according to various sources: [arrested in Baakuba](#) in January; left "[seriously injured, possibly dead](#)" after a US-led offensive in May; [evacuated to a neighbouring country](#) "with the help of doctors from the Arab Peninsula and the Sudan"; [killed in fighting in Ramadi in June](#) and buried in Fallujah; and [killed again](#) in a terrorist bombing in Mosul in November.

This remarkable career finally came to an end when, we were told, Zarqawi had been killed yet again (and presumably for good) in June of 2006.

MILITARY BRIEFER: The lead aircraft is going to engage it here momentarily with a 500-pound bomb on the target.

ROSS CAMERON: Two bombs dropped by an American F-16 strike home. A house outside Baqubah, north of Baghdad, is flattened. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq and one of the world's most wanted men, has been eliminated.

Iraqi police, who've lost hundreds of comrades in attacks blamed on Zarqawi, are celebrating. The White House is relieved.

BUSH: Now Zarqawi has met his end and this violent man will never murder again.

SOURCE: [*Al-Qaeda's Iraqi leader al-Zarqawi has been killed*](#)

But not everyone believed that this final account of Zarqawi's death was the true one. Rather than simply mistakes in reporting, other members of the Iraqi resistance insisted that Zarqawi had in fact been killed early on in the US invasion and that his name was simply being used to create an excuse for the continued American occupation of the country.

Sheikh Jawad Al-Khalessi, a noted Shiite imam in Baghdad, was [quoted in *Le Monde*](#) as saying:

I don't think Abu Musab al-Zarqawi exists. He died in Northern Iraq at the beginning of the war (his family even conducted a funeral ceremony in Jordan). Since then, his name has been nothing but a toy, an excuse used by Americans to stay in Iraq.

Al-Khalessi was not the only one with his doubts about Zarqawi's true nature. The Project on Defense Alternatives of the Commonwealth Institute in Massachusetts released [a report](#) in 2004 excoriating the US government for its propaganda attempting to portray Zarqawi as a terrorist leader in Iraq:

The evidence offered to support the administration's assessment of Zarqawi as a driver of the Iraqi insurgency and top lieutenant of bin Laden is reminiscent, in form and substance, of the spurious evidence regarding Iraq weapons of mass destruction. Indeed, some of the sources may be the same.

Similarly, [*The Financial Times*](#), [*The Telegraph*](#), [*Knight Ridder Newspapers*](#), [*The Los Angeles Times*](#) and [*Newsweek*](#) all published stories in 2004 calling various aspects of the Zarqawi myth into question.

A [report in *The Telegraph* in 2006](#) called him "a figurehead around whom dissident groups in Iraq were rallying, rather than an elusive fighter directing military operations," noting that "the more the Americans blamed al-Zarqawi for terrorist atrocities, the greater his credibility on the Arab street," and quoting an "unnamed Sunni insurgent leader" as calling Zarqawi "an American, Israeli and Iranian agent who is trying to keep our country unstable so that the Sunnis will keep facing occupation."

[According to *The Atlantic*](#), even Osama bin Laden himself "suspected that the group of Jordanian prisoners with whom al-Zarqawi had been granted amnesty [in 1998] had been infiltrated by Jordanian intelligence."

And then, right before he was reported dead for the last time, skeptics of the Zarqawi narrative were proven right in a remarkable fashion. On April 9, 2006, *The Washington Post* [published proof](#) in the form of internal military documents that the US government had played up the myth of Zarqawi and Al Qaeda in Iraq as part of a psychological operations campaign:

The US military is conducting a propaganda campaign to magnify the role of the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq, according to internal military documents and officers familiar with the program. [. . .] For the past two years, US military leaders have been using Iraqi media and other outlets in Baghdad to publicize Zarqawi's role in the insurgency. The documents explicitly list the 'U.S. Home Audience' as one of the targets of a broader propaganda campaign.

In case there was any doubt that the propaganda campaign *was* targeted at Americans, the program included the Pentagon "selectively leaking" a letter to a US reporter purported to be written by Zarqawi and boasting of his

role in the wave of suicide attacks terrorizing Iraq. The letter was dutifully [covered by The New York Times](#) even though there were [serious questions](#) about whether it was real at all.

The *Washington Post* exposé quotes an internal briefing document produced by US military headquarters in Iraq revealing that US military chief spokesman Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt boasted that "[t]he Zarqawi PSYOP program is the most successful information campaign to date."

And then, two months after these explosive revelations, Zarqawi was reported dead for the last time, a character written out of the script once his value as a propaganda construct was exhausted.

With Zarqawi out of the picture, something else would be required to keep the American public, and the people of the world, invested in the War on Terror. The main villain in the battle would have to return. Thankfully for the US government, Osama bin Laden was only too happy to oblige.

From the time of his miraculous "escape" from Tora Bora on, the outside world only knew Osama bin Laden from his occasional video releases.

The most infamous of these productions was [a video](#) released to the public by the US Defense Department on December 13, 2001. Supposedly "obtained in Afghanistan during the search of a private home in Jalalabad" after anti-Taliban forces moved in to the city, the tape, [we are told](#), "bore a label indicating it was made on November 9" and "shows bin Laden sitting on the floor in a bare room in a house in Kandahar" with "several other men, including two aides and an unidentified cleric, or Sheikh." Most importantly, it contains—according to the Pentagon-provided subtitles that were added to the video before its distribution to the press—bin Laden's confession to planning the 9/11 attacks.

"We had notification since the previous Thursday that the event would take place that day," the US government translation has bin Laden saying. "We calculated in advance the number of casualties from the enemy who would be killed based on the position of the tower."

The [press release](#) provided by the Pentagon noted that, due to the poor quality of the tape, they were not able to produce a verbatim transcript, but that their translation "does convey the messages and information flow" of the conversation, an answer that was apparently good enough for the White House press corps.

REPORTER: Ari, on the bin Laden video that the government released last week, can you offer assurances that the omissions in the government-supplied translation were not deliberate?

ARI FLEISCHER: Mark, I think Secretary Rumsfeld addressed that very eloquently earlier today, when he said, number one, this tape doesn't change anything—or, this translation doesn't change anything about the facts in the case. The Department of Defense translators worked very diligently on a very short timetable to put together a faithful translation and that's what they did. And if you note on the cover note of what the Department of Defense put out, they wrote "due to the quality of the original tape, it is not a verbatim transcript of every word spoken during the meeting; but does convey the messages and information flow."

So I think what you saw was the very best effort possible and, as the Secretary said about the translation of Arabic, it's not a precise art that is agreed to by every translator.

SOURCE: [White House Daily Press Briefing — December 13, 2001](#)

But this answer was not sufficient for the foreign press. The following week, German TV channel Das Erste broadcast an edition of their investigate program, "[Monitor](#)," in which they hired their own independent translators to check the Pentagon's transcript of the tape. The report calls the Pentagon translation "very

problematic," [noting](#) that "at the most important places where it is held to prove the guilt of bin Laden, it is not identical with the Arabic."

Translator Dr. Murad Alami, for instance, found that in the sentence "We calculated in advance the number of casualties from the enemy," the words "in advance" had simply been inserted by the US government translators. Those words did not appear on the tape. Similarly, the word "previous" in "We had notification since the previous Thursday," was never said, and the subsequent statement that an event would take place on that day cannot be heard in the original Arabic version.

The Monitor report concludes that the Pentagon translation of Osama bin Laden's supposed confession tape—deliberately adding words in key passages to make it sound like a confession—was not only inaccurate but actually manipulative. As Gernot Rotter, a professor of Islamic and Arabic Studies at the Asia-Africa Institute at the University of Hamburg, states in the report: "The American translators who listened to the tapes and transcribed them apparently wrote a lot of things in that they wanted to hear but that cannot be heard on the tape no matter how many times you listen to it."

The startling revelation that the Osama bin Laden confession tape was not a confession tape at all—aired on Germany's premiere public broadcaster and widely discussed in the [German press](#)—was never reported in the US.

That video was followed in short order by a 30-minute video of a visibly gaunt and graying Osama bin Laden delivering what appears to be a last message to the Arab world. Released on December 27, 2001, and presumably recorded during the fight at Tora Bora, bin Laden comments on his own mortality: "God willing, America's end is near. And it doesn't depend on my continued existence. Whether Osama is killed or not, the awakening has begun." In the 30-minute video, bin Laden does not move his left arm at all and appears visibly weak.

Interested at that moment in turning the public's attention away from Osama bin Laden and toward the next front in the War on Terror, Iraq, the Bush administration [dismissed the video](#) as "sick propaganda possibly designed to mask the fact the Al Qaeda leader was already dead."

"He could have made the video and then ordered that it be released in the event of his death," *The Telegraph* quoted one White House aide as saying. "The guy is trying to show he's untouched by the US bombing but he looks under pressure to me."

Recorded months after his reported journey to Rawalpindi for kidney dialysis, this video would not be the first or the last time that Osama bin Laden would be reported as dead or dying. Like Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, bin Laden was also reported dead on [several occasions](#) in the ensuing years, including:

- on December 26, 2001, when it was [reported](#) that Osama bin Laden had died from a serious lung complication in Tora Bora;
- on January 18, 2002, when Pakistani President [Pervez Musharraf told CNN](#): "I think now, frankly, he is dead for the reason he is a . . . kidney patient";
- in September 2006, when French intelligence [leaked a report](#) suggesting bin Laden had died of typhoid fever in Pakistan;
- and in March 2009, when former US foreign intelligence officer Angelo Codevilla [stated](#): "All the evidence suggests Elvis Presley is more alive today than Osama bin Laden."

But, also like Zarqawi, none of these reported deaths stopped the Osama bin Laden character from reappearing on the TV screens of a traumatized public to remind them of the importance of the ongoing war on terror.

What followed in the ensuing years was a series of video and audio releases of questionable provenance, often reported in carefully worded turns of phrase that gave the press plausible deniability as to whether or not the recordings really were of Osama bin Laden. A message aired on Al Jazeera in February 2003, for instance, was [reported by the BBC](#) as "a poor quality audio recording in which a man's voice, identified as bin Laden's, is heard calling for suicide attacks against Americans and resistance to any attack on Iraq."

The recordings were often mundane. An April 2006 audio message of a speaker "[believed to be Osama bin Laden](#)" called on Muslims to "prepare for a long war" in Sudan. A January 2010 audio message warned of the [dangers of climate change](#). "Talk about climate change is not an ideological luxury but a reality," the speaker, [purportedly bin Laden](#), told his fellow *jihadis*.

Other recordings appeared at opportune times for the planners of the war on terror, catapulting the terror threat back into the public consciousness just when questions about that narrative were beginning to emerge.

The 2004 US presidential election contest between George Bush and John Kerry, for instance, featured an unusual "October surprise": a [new Osama bin Laden videotape](#) in which the terror mastermind appears to claim responsibility for 9/11 and to warn the American public of future strikes.

ANNOUNCER: This is the CBS Evening News with Dan Rather reporting from CBS News Headquarters in New York.

DAN RATHER: Good evening. With just four days left in the presidential campaign, Osama bin Laden suddenly dropped himself right in the middle of it with a videotaped message to the people of the United States. The fugitive Al Qaeda leader admits for the first time that he indeed ordered the September 11th attack on America, he lays out his reasons for it and he threatens another attack.

This tape tends to confirm that bin Laden is alive and well safely somewhere. President Bush responded by saying the United States will not be intimidated. Senator Kerry said the country is united in its determination to hunt bin Laden down.

SOURCE: [CBS Evening News - October 29, 2004](#)

And then again, in September 2007, just days before General David Petraeus was set to deliver his [report to Congress](#) on the controversial "surge" in Iraq and just days before the sixth anniversary of 9/11, [there was Osama bin Laden](#) to remind the public of the ever-present terror threat.

CHARLES GIBSON: Just days before the sixth anniversary of 9/11, the man responsible for the death and horror that day is coming out of the shadows with a new videotape and more invective aimed at the United States. He lectures Americans on everything from religion to politics to taxes. No overt threats, but authorities are looking at whether the tape contains any signal to indicate a future attack.

SOURCE: [ABC World News Tonight With Charles Gibson In Kansas City, MO, September 7, 2007](#)

Capitalizing on the conveniently timed video release, President Bush was quick to cite it as evidence that Al Qaeda *was* connected to the war in Iraq and that the increasingly unpopular war—now generally understood to have been an illegal invasion waged on false pretenses—was in fact an essential part of the war on terror.

BUSH: I found it interesting that on the tape, Iraq was mentioned, which is a reminder that Iraq is a part of this war against extremists.

SOURCE: [Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan in Sydney, Australia](#)

But buried beneath the attention-grabbing headlines and substance-less soundbites with which the media covered this release, troubling questions began to arise about the nature of the video. The aging, weary, gaunt, graying and partially paralyzed Osama bin Laden of 2001 was gone, replaced by a visibly younger and healthier man, despite having numerous health problems and despite having presumably spent the better part of a decade on the run as the world's most wanted man.

Sporting jet black hair and what many media commentators pointed out looked like a fake beard, the figure on the screen seems to be moving in an unrealistic way. Bizarrely, [the video freezes](#) at the 1-minute-and-58-second mark while the audio continues. The image remains frozen for most of the video message, only resuming briefly around the 12-minute mark. What's more, all of the references to current events—those parts referenced in passing on the evening news as "proving that Osama is still alive"—take place during the times when the video is frozen.

In fact, the video proved so unusual that media commentators had to go out of their way to assure their viewers that it was indeed real.

GIBSON: Our chief investigative correspondent, Brian Ross, joins me again tonight from New York. Brian?

BRIAN ROSS: Charlie, US authorities say tonight there is no doubt the tape is authentic. It *is* bin Laden, black beard and all.

SOURCE: [ABC World News Tonight With Charles Gibson In Kansas City, MO, September 7, 2007](#)

Perhaps the strangest part of the video, however, was the manner in which it was released to the public. The video, it turns out, was not released by Al Qaeda, but by the US government.

The month after the video's release it was [reported](#) that the video had originally been "intercepted" by SITE Intelligence Group, described as "one of several small, commercial intelligence firms that specialize in intercepting al-Qaeda's internet communications, often by clandestine means." According to [The Washington Post](#):

SITE founder Rita Katz told The Post that her company covertly obtained an early copy of a bin Laden video message in early September, then shared the video with senior administration officials on Sept. 7 on the condition that it not be distributed or made public before its official release. Soon afterward, the video was downloaded by dozens of computers registered to government agencies. Within hours, SITE's copy of the video was leaked to television news networks and broadcast worldwide.

It was not explained how SITE had "obtained an early copy" of an Osama bin Laden video, but it was far from the only time that mysteriously well-connected internet researchers had unexplained exclusive access to Al Qaeda video productions. Researchers and companies who supposedly scooped the intelligence agencies by "discovering" and publishing Al Qaeda messages (sometimes even ahead of Al Qaeda itself) included:

- SITE, or the "Search for International Terrorist Entities," whose [promotional materials](#) touted the company's "one-of-a-kind access" to "messages, videos, and advance warnings of suicide bombings" from "the most hard-to-reach corners of violent online extremist communities," whose clientele included leading media outlets and even government agencies, and whose founder, Rita Katz, was born in Iraq to a wealthy Jewish businessman father who was convicted of spying for Israel in 1969 in a military tribunal and executed in a public hanging (which, [we are told](#), Katz did not think had much bearing on her work) and who, despite not having any intelligence connections herself, found a job allowing her to search for terrorists online shortly after moving to New York in the 1990s;

- "[Laura Mansfield](#)," a pseudonymous South Carolina housewife who—despite being a self-described "mom sitting here in her dining room typing away on my computer"—is fluent in Arabic, who likes to "monitor" *jihadi* message boards and chat rooms, and who—with no special training or connections to the world of terror or espionage—was consistently able to find and publicize Al Qaeda videos before anyone else, including: [a "2007" video of Osama bin Laden](#) that, it was quickly discovered, was [actually a five-year-old video](#) that had already been previously released but reported as "new" by the credulous mainstream press; and multiple releases featuring "Azzam the American," a.k.a. Adam Pearlman, the Jewish Californian whose [grandfather was a board member of the Anti-Defamation League](#) and who, [we are told](#), converted to Islam with a single internet post and was quickly recruited by Al Qaeda to serve as "translator, video producer, and cultural interpreter" for their media committee;

ADAM GADAHN: All you who believe, fight the unbelievers who are closest in proximity to you and let them find harshness in you. And know that Allah is with those who fear him.

SOURCE: [Al Qaeda: Hoax](#)

- and IntelCenter, a company [described as](#) "a private contractor working for intelligence agencies" and headed by Ben Venzke—the former Director of Intelligence Special Projects at iDefense, where he worked alongside people like Jim Melnick, a psychological operations specialist who served sixteen years in the US Army and the Defense Intelligence Agency—that similarly supplied the US government and media with Al Qaeda videos released by As-Sahab, the terror group's media production arm, and somehow exclusively obtained by this private contractor in Virginia.

The public had good reason to question the reality of these suspiciously timed and mysteriously sourced audio and video recordings.

In 1999, William Arkin wrote a piece for *The Washington Post* called "[When Seeing and Hearing Isn't Believing](#)" in which he reported on the digital morphing technologies that were then being worked on by research teams at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico and elsewhere. He reported on one demonstration of this technology—a fake recording of Gen. Carl W. Steiner, former Commander-in-Chief, US Special Operations Command, announcing "Gentlemen! We have called you together to inform you that we are going to overthrow the United States government." The fake audio was so impressive that General Steiner asked for a copy. Another demonstration involved Colin Powell announcing that he was being well treated by his captors.

"Digital morphing — voice, video, and photo — has come of age, available for use in psychological operations. PSYOPS, as the military calls it, seek to exploit human vulnerabilities in enemy governments, militaries and populations to pursue national and battlefield objectives. [. . .] Being able to manufacture convincing audio or video, they say, might be the difference in a successful military operation or coup."

The technology continued to feature in PSYOPS planning as the war of terror dragged on. In 2003, the CIA Iraq Operations Group came up with a "[wacky idea](#)" for discrediting Saddam Hussein in the eyes of his people: to create a video purporting to show the Iraqi dictator having sex with a teenage boy. Amazingly, Stein also confirmed that the CIA *did* make a fake video of Osama bin Laden:

The agency actually did make a video purporting to show Osama bin Laden and his cronies sitting around a campfire swigging bottles of liquor and savoring their conquests with boys, one of the former CIA officers recalled, chuckling at the memory.

But as successful as these information operations and Al Qaeda media releases were in keeping the terror threat in the minds of the public, the neocons directing this war of terror were going to need much more than that to

meet their objectives. The war on terror, launched in Afghanistan and waged in Iraq, was never meant to end there.-

BUSH: The other strain of radicalism in the Middle East is Shi'a extremism, supported and embodied by the regime that sits in Tehran. Iran has long been a source of trouble in the region. It is the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism.

[. . .]

Iran's actions threaten the security of nations everywhere. And that is why the United States is rallying friends and allies around the world to isolate the regime, to impose economic sanctions. We will confront this danger, before it is too late.

SOURCE: [*Remarks at the American Legion National Convention in Reno, Nevada*](#)

But getting the public—already weary of the years-long struggle in Afghanistan and increasingly disillusioned with the debacle in Iraq—on board with the invasion of yet another country was going to be difficult unless another spectacular terror event came along to justify opening up yet another front in the war on terror. And, if the terror bogeyman was not willing to provide such a justification, the neocons were once again ready and willing to create it.

FAIZ SHAKIR: What you're writing there is that Cheney—there was a meeting in the White House where Cheney presided over looking to cook up the next war, a false war based on false intelligence!

[. . .]

SEYMOUR HERSH: There was a dozen ideas proffered about how to trigger a war. The one that interested me the most was why don't we build - we in our shipyard - build four or five boats that look like Iranian PT boats. Put Navy SEALs on them with a lot of arms. And next time one of our boats goes to the Straits of Hormuz, start a shoot-up. Might cost some lives and it was rejected, because you can't have Americans killing Americans. But that that's the level of stuff we were talking about. Provocation.

SOURCE: [*Cheney Plans to Blow Up Americans*](#)

Seymour Hersh was not the only one warning about the possibility of the Bush White House staging a terror event in the waning days of its administration to trigger a bold new escalation with Iran. Even Zbigniew Brzezinski—whose involvement in Operation Cyclone started the American involvement in Afghanistan that led to the creation of Al Qaeda in the first place—[warned the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 2007](#) that a military provocation or terrorist act whose origin "would be very difficult to trace" could be staged and blamed on Tehran in order to justify US military action on Iran.

BRZEZINSKI: A plausible scenario for a military collision with Iran involves Iraqi failure to meet the benchmarks followed by accusations of the Iranian responsibility for the failure, then by some provocation in Iraq or a terrorist act in the United States blamed on Iran, culminating in a "defensive" US military action against Iran that plunges a lonely America into a spreading and deepening quagmire eventually ranging across Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

SOURCE: [*Zbigniew Brzezinski: Transcript of Testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*](#)

But the neocons—suffering from plummeting approval ratings, mounting domestic difficulties and the ramifications of a global financial crisis—no longer had the political capital to stage terror events and garner

public approval for their agenda. By 2008, after seven long years in the grip of the existential threat that they were told was the basis for a generation-defining, civilizational struggle with no end in sight, the American public was getting tired. They didn't want the neocons and their endless war on terror. They were hoping for change.

Luckily for them, that's precisely what the 2008 US presidential election seemed to offer.

The public was ready for change. In fact, the idea of a shift from the bellicose, belligerent, aggressive foreign policy and the war on terror rhetoric of the neocons to the promised hope and change of the Obama administration was so enticing that not only did Obama win the 2008 election, he also won over the world at large. So excited were people for the prospect of peace that the Nobel Peace Prize committee decided to bestow their 2009 prize on Obama before he had taken a single substantive action in office.

THORBJORN JAGLUND: Good morning. Den Norske Nobelkomite har bestemt at Nobels fredspris for 2009 skal tildeles president Barack Obama for hans ekstraordinære innsats for å styrke internasjonalt diplomati og mellomfolkelig samarbeid.

SOURCE: [*2009 Nobel Peace Prize Announcement*](#)

Those not swept up in the hope and change delirium were quick to point out that the committee had made a mistake in handing a peace prize to a president still actively involved in military engagements. What not even his most cynical critics seemed prepared for, however, was the idea that Obama would not only continue the Bush administration's war on terror but that he would greatly expand it. From the two-front war in Afghanistan and Iraq under Bush, Obama would ultimately lead the war of terror into *seven* countries.

One of Obama's first moves in office was to oversee a dramatic escalation in Afghanistan, a "[troop surge](#)" that was meant to resolve the security issues in the country but actually exacerbated them, finally leading to the dramatic downfall of the US-backed regime and the reinstallation of the Taliban in 2021. And, as we shall see, despite promising a swift resolution to the war in Iraq, not only was the handover of authority to the Iraqi government delayed as long as legally possible but the US was ultimately drawn in again as the terror group that they fostered led to a battle against the Islamic State.

But the newly revitalized war on terror—now given new cover by a smiling, peace-prizing-winning, softer-spoken Commander-in-Chief—did not end there.

Obama oversaw the expansion of Bush's drone war into Pakistan:

ANCHOR: US President Barack Obama, meanwhile, has admitted for the first time that drones are regularly striking Taliban and Al Qaeda targets in Pakistan's tribal areas.

SOURCE: [*Obama defends illegal drone attacks*](#)

OBAMA: I want to make sure that people understand actually drones have *not* caused a huge number of civilian casualties. For the most part, they have been very precise, precision strikes against Al Qaeda and their affiliates.

SOURCE: [*Your Interview with the President - 2012*](#)

He led the "kinetic military action" in Libya against previous war on terror ally Moammar Gaddafi:

OBAMA: Good afternoon, everybody. Today I authorized the Armed Forces of the United States to begin a limited military action in Libya in support of an international effort to protect Libyan civilians. That action has now begun.

SOURCE: [*President Obama Authorizes Limited Military Action in Libya*](#)

He began the decade-long attempt to overthrow previous war on terror ally Bashar al-Assad in Syria:

OBAMA: My policy from the beginning has been that President Assad had lost credibility, that he attacked his own people, has killed his own people, unleashed a military against innocent civilians, and that the only way to bring stability and peace to Syria is going to be for Assad to step down and to move forward on a political transition.

SOURCE: [*Obama: Assad Must Step Down for Syrian Peace*](#)

He waged war in Yemen along with the Saudi government, who had supported and fostered terror groups in the region for years:

AMY GOODMAN: Documents obtained by Reuters show the US government is concerned it could be implicated in potential war crimes in Yemen because of its support for a Saudi-led coalition air campaign. The Obama administration has continued to authorize weapons sales to Saudi Arabia despite warnings last year from government lawyers that it might be considered a co-belligerent under international law.

SOURCE: [*U.S.-Backed Saudi Forces Bomb Yemeni Funeral*](#)

And he extended the "[Authorization for Use of Military Force](#)"—the legislation passed in the wake of 9/11 authorizing the president to "use all necessary and appropriate force" against those nations, organizations or persons he determines "planned, authorized, committed or aided" that attack—to include Al-Shabaab in Somalia.

JOHN KERRY: The United States, obviously, has been engaged in helping Somalia fight back against tribal terror and the challenges to the cohesion of the state of Somalia. And the President and his allies have really done an amazing job of fighting back and building a state structure.

SOURCE: [*Secretary Kerry Delivers Remarks With Somali President Mohamud*](#)

But although these escalations appeared to be a mere continuation of the War on Terror that was sold to the public in the wake of 9/11, they were not. In fact, it quickly became apparent that a remarkable transition had begun to occur. Al Qaeda, the ultimate face of evil and the undisputed enemy in the grand terror war narrative, were now the "good guys"—or at least serviceable allies—in the fight against the next target in the war of terror.

This unbelievable turnaround had in fact begun during the Bush administration, when the neocons had started to set their sites on Iran. Being predominately Shiite, Iran is in fact the enemy of the radical Wahabbis and Salafist Muslims that populate the ranks of Al Qaeda and other Sunni terror groups. In targeting Iran, the US—like the British Empire before them—found it convenient to switch allegiances, arming, funding and promoting the very radicals they had just been at war with in order to defeat their enemy of the moment.

As Seymour Hersh [reported in 2007](#):

In the past few months, as the situation in Iraq has deteriorated, the Bush Administration, in both its public diplomacy and its covert operations, has significantly shifted its Middle East strategy. The "redirection," as some inside the White House have called the new strategy, has brought the United States closer to an open

confrontation with Iran and, in parts of the region, propelled it into a widening sectarian conflict between Shiite and Sunni Muslims.

To undermine Iran, which is predominantly Shiite, the Bush Administration has decided, in effect, to reconfigure its priorities in the Middle East. [. . .] A byproduct of these activities has been the bolstering of Sunni extremist groups that espouse a militant vision of Islam and are hostile to America and sympathetic to Al Qaeda.

As Hersh detailed in his articles on "[The Redirection](#)" and "[Preparing the Battlefield](#)," and as other mainstream sources eventually corroborated, this "shift in Middle East strategy" by the Bush administration included:

- [supporting Fatah al-Islam](#)—a militant Islamic fighting force [led by](#) a "former associate of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi" dedicated to "spreading the ideology of Al Qaeda"—in their struggle against Iranian ally (and Israeli enemy) Hezbollah;
- providing covert funds to the Mujahedin-e-Khalq, a strange [cult-of-personality](#) that, as a violent group of radicals that participated in bombings [inside Iran](#) and even aided Mossad in [assassinating Iranian scientists](#), was not merely lauded by the US but [openly promoted at gala events](#) by neocons and their fellow-travellers;
- [secretly backing "opposition groups" in Syria](#), one of Iran's most important regional allies;
- and "[supplying money and weapons](#)" to Jundullah, a group with "[close ties to Al Qaeda](#)" (including reportedly being at one time headed by alleged "9/11 mastermind" Khalid Sheikh Mohammed) that "[conducted raids into Iran from bases in Pakistan](#)" with covert CIA assistance.

That these operations would have started under Bush and the neocons came as little surprise to those who knew anything about the real nature of the so-called war on terror. That they would be continued and even expanded under Obama, the Ambassador of Hope and Change, was more surprising to those who did not yet grasp the true scale and scope of this war.

No, the substance of the Bush redirection did not change under Obama, only the tone and flavour of that policy changed. Obama did not win [multiple](#) advertising [awards](#) for his 2008 Hope and Change election campaign for nothing. As a shrewd salesman of an unpopular agenda, he knew that to get the public on board with such a radical shift in objectives, he was going to need an equally radical event to take place to tie a bow on the Osama bin Laden narrative and redirect the public's attention.

And, on May 2, 2011, that event occurred.

OBAMA: Good evening. Tonight, I can report to the American people and to the world that the United States has conducted an operation that killed Osama bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaeda, and a terrorist who's responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent men, women, and children.

SOURCE: [*Osama bin Laden Dead*](#)

Codenamed Operation Neptune Spear, the mission to kill bin Laden involved a daring team of Navy SEALs flying two stealth-modified Black Hawk helicopters from the Jalalabad military base in Afghanistan through Pakistani air space straight to Abbottabad—the affluent military town where the world's most wanted man had evidently been living for years, evading the most comprehensive dragnet in history. Crash landing one of the choppers in the compound courtyard, a massive firefight broke out. The SEALs, clearing weapons stashes and barricades while fending off bin Laden's henchmen, made their way to the third-floor bedroom where the dastardly villain used one of his wives as a human shield. Shooting her in the leg to get her out of the way, the SEALs then managed to land two shots on their target, one hitting bin Laden in the head and the other in the chest—just as the terror kingpin was reaching for the gun he kept at the ready by his headboard.

Making good their escape, the Navy SEAL heroes blew up their damaged helicopter while a standby chopper that had been prepared for the mission in case of an emergency flew in and whisked the remaining task force members out with bin Laden's body in tow. Returning to Bagram Air Base, bin Laden's body was immediately flown out to the USS *Carl Vinson*, where it was buried at sea in accordance with Islamic tradition.

And just like that, it was done. Public Enemy number one, the face of the war on terror, was dead; slain by the valiant Navy SEALs in a daring operation that was broadcast in real time to the White House Situation Room, where the Commander-in-Chief of the War of Terror, Barack Obama, and his iron-willed cabinet of terror warriors watched with steely determination.

Indeed, this was not the stuff of history books, no dry, dusty tale of some minor police action or military operation. It may not have been the grand showdown in the cave fortress that the public had been prepared for, but—befitting the comic book supervillain of the war on terror narrative—this was the stuff of Hollywood blockbusters.

DEVGRU OPERATOR: Geronimo. For God and country. Geronimo.

SOURCE: [*Zero Dark Thirty* \(2012\)](#)

Yes, this *was* the stuff of Hollywood blockbusters. But, like a Hollywood blockbuster, the story of the raid was itself fiction. In fact, in the face of mild questioning by the generally deferential press, every single aspect of the confusing and often contradictory story that was told to the public in those euphoric hours after Obama's momentous announcement was proven to be a lie.

There had been [no firefight](#).

Osama was [not armed](#).

He did not use his wife as a [human shield](#).

Burial at sea was not part of Islamic tradition. In fact, it was [directly opposed to that tradition](#).

Even the [famous picture from the Situation Room](#) was a lie; there had been [no live video feed](#) of the raid.

But it wasn't just the details of the raid itself that had been a fabrication; the entire story of the decade-long manhunt for Osama, dramatized in Oscar-winning movies like *Zero Dark Thirty* and recounted in countless reports, books and tell-alls, proved to be similarly fraudulent.

In fact, the story began to fall apart from the very moment it was told to the public. But while most of the press remained content to pick at the corners of the story, leaving the substance of the narrative intact, others dug deeper, looking for answers amid the confusing confluence of lies, obfuscations, cover-ups and contradictions that surrounded the raid.

In a [lengthy article](#) for *The London Review of Books* in 2015 that—sourcing to unnamed, retired officials with no direct knowledge of the events recounted—was about as solidly sourced as the official account, Seymour Hersh alleged that, while bin Laden had indeed been killed in Abbottabad, he had in fact been living at the compound as a prisoner of the ISI for years and that every part of the official narrative of the raid—from the story of the "Al Qaeda courier" by which the CIA allegedly discovered the compound to the phony vaccination drive to collect bin Laden's DNA to the burial at sea—was in fact an element of an elaborate (and seemingly unnecessary) cover story to obscure that fact.

In a [piece for *The Independent*](#) the year after the raid, Patrick Cockburn pointed out the inherent contradiction between early reports that the raid had uncovered a "[treasure trove](#)" of intelligence that "portrayed bin Laden as a spider at the centre of a conspiratorial web" and later admissions that he had had almost no contact with the outside world and was increasingly delusional about his organization and its capabilities.

Others simply [pointed out](#) that, given this was at least the [ninth occasion](#) in which journalists, politicians, intelligence officials or others had pronounced Osama bin Laden dead, it was not to be believed without evidence.

But that evidence was not forthcoming. Instead, the government went to extraordinary lengths to cover it up. All the files from the raid—including "copies of the death certificate and autopsy report for bin Laden as well as the results of tests to identify the body"—were [deleted from the Pentagon's computers](#) and transferred to the CIA, where they could be more carefully guarded from Freedom of Information Act requests.

Pictures and video of the raid, including pictures of Osama bin Laden's dead body that—the [public were told](#)—may be released, were instead [sealed away forever](#).

At the time, all that *was* released were a few short videos of a man purported to be Osama bin Laden that—it was claimed—had been taken from the compound (although it was never explained why bin Laden would have poorly shot video of his back to the camera, watching himself on TV) and some salacious details about the records allegedly seized from the compound's computers—like the devout Muslim *jihadi's* [predilection for porn](#)—that seemed reminiscent of the CIA's previous "wacky ideas" for faking videos about Hussein and bin Laden.

But CIA director Leon Panetta *did* [leak classified details](#) of the raid at a 2011 award ceremony attended by Mark Boal, the screenwriter who would go on to write and produce *Zero Dark Thirty*, the Hollywood dramatization of the manhunt for Osama that portrayed the official version of the raid on the silver screen and even falsely implied that the CIA's illegal torture program had been essential in helping to track down the terror kingpin.

The full truth of what happened in Abbottabad, now obscured by lies, misinformation, selective "leaks," self-serving tell-alls and still-classified data will likely never see the light of day. But to the directors of the War of Terror, that is beside the point. Osama bin Laden had served his purpose as the villain in the terror war story. And, having served that purpose, he was being written out of the script.

In the end, that was all Osama bin Laden had ever been: a character in the terror war drama. One so good that, if he didn't exist, they would have had to invent him.

RATHER: Well, it's pretty obvious the judgment is coalescing around the president that it was Osama bin Laden.

MILT BEARDEN: I know we live in a country where we're often told that the first thing that comes to your mind, put it down. Put the little mark in there.

I feel slightly uncomfortable because I spent so many years wondering how the myth of Osama bin Laden got started. We have the Osama bin Laden who was the great war hero in Afghanistan. We have Osama bin Laden who was trained by CIA, funded and supported by CIA during three years of war.

I was there at the same time bin Laden was there. He was *not* the great warrior that went in and fought the Soviet Union to a standstill. The CIA had nothing to do with him.

I think that that mythological Osama bin Laden—never mind that he's an absolutely evil man—but the mythological Osama bin Laden causes me trouble, and I think maybe there is another answer out there. I'm not certain that I know what it is.

[. . .]

RATHER: There's no question in my mind that you're skeptical that Osama bin Laden, aided and abetted or at least protected with the Taliban, should be the principal target of some large military operation. If I'm wrong, tell me now.

BEARDEN: No, no, no. You're not wrong, Dan. [What] I'm saying is—let me step back one step on this and say Osama bin Laden is an evil man and he's a component of the terrorism that we're dealing with across the board. All I'm saying is that I think Osama bin Laden has become the metaphor for the entire problem of terrorism involving Muslims with perceived grievances against the United States and I think it would be wrong to say this is a one-size-fits-all operation and to go after bin Laden because an operation as sophisticated as carried out yesterday was an operation that was concealed from us for months, probably, before it took place. It happened without, essentially, a hitch, except for one aircraft. And there is no reason to believe that these same people weren't capable of covering their tracks somehow on the way out.

Now, I would go so far as to say that this group who was responsible for that, if they didn't have an Osama bin Laden out there they'd invent one because he's a terrific diversion for the rest of the world.

SOURCE: [CBS Sept. 13, 2001 0:14 am - 0:56 am](#)

The death of Osama bin Laden may have ended one chapter in the War on Terror, but it was not the end of the story. In a key sense, that story would simply repeat, with the rise of Al Qaeda serving as a template that the terror war planners could draw upon as needed in their efforts to prolong their never-ending conflict indefinitely.

The alignment with radical Islamists to achieve short-term geostrategic goals—a strategy refined by the British Empire over centuries of practice in the "Great Game" of global geopolitics and reaching its apotheosis with the US operation to arm the Afghan Mujahideen in the 1980s—was simply employed once again as the US led its NATO allies in a ["humanitarian war"](#) against Moammar Gaddafi in Libya. Former enemies in the war on terror, including veterans of the Iraq insurgency who had been killing American troops in Iraq, and even designated terrorists who had been rendered and tortured by the CIA, were [now the good guys](#), helping to overthrow Gaddafi's government in Tripoli.

That same story played out yet again in Syria, where the US and its regional allies once again made a deal with the devil, this time in the name of toppling the government of Bashar al-Assad. [Arming](#) the most radical elements of these terror groups with US-procured weapons and [training](#) them at a US joint operation base in Jordan, it was not long before the Bush-era "redirection" of the terror war was complete and Al Qaeda was now widely recognized as a convenient ally of the US in Syria.

In 2012, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) Senior Fellow Ed Husain wrote of ["Al-Qaeda's Specter in Syria,"](#) noting that "The Syrian rebels would be immeasurably weaker today without Al Qaeda in their ranks."

In 2014, a trio of foreign policy "experts" published a piece for the CFR on ["The Good and Bad of Ahrar al-Sham: An Al Qaeda-Linked Group Worth Befriending."](#)

And in 2015, Barak Mendelsohn—writing in the pages of the same *Foreign Affairs* magazine in which Philip Zelikow and his co-authors had "predicted" the terror war—penned ["Accepting Al Qaeda: The Enemy of the United States' Enemy,"](#) in which he argued:

Since 9/11, Washington has considered Al Qaeda the greatest threat to the United States, one that must be eliminated regardless of cost or time. After Washington killed Osama bin Laden in 2011, it made Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Al Qaeda's new leader, its next number one target. But the instability in the Middle East following the Arab revolutions and the meteoric rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) require that Washington rethink its policy toward Al Qaeda, particularly its targeting of Zawahiri. Destabilizing Al Qaeda at this time may in fact work against U.S. efforts to defeat ISIS.

In conclusion, Mendelson writes flatly: "It is certainly ironic that at this point, when the United States is the closest it has ever been to destroying Al Qaeda, its interests would be better served by keeping the terrorist organization afloat and Zawahiri alive."

Such arguments, unthinkable during the bin Laden years, were suddenly not only thinkable but were being openly promoted in Beltway foreign policy think tank circles. That such a dramatic turnaround could even be considered, let alone advocated, so soon after the years-long propaganda campaign portraying Al Qaeda as an existential threat to the West is only surprising to those who were ignorant of the real history of Al Qaeda and the real origins of the terror war.

To those who *did* know this history, the fact that those in the State Department's orbit were now openly calling for accommodation of and even alliance with Al Qaeda came as no surprise. And it similarly came as no surprise that this alliance led—exactly as it had in Afghanistan in the 1980s—to the rise of a new terror group: the Islamic State.

Rising from the ashes of the same Al Qaeda in Iraq that had been led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi—the US military's self-proclaimed "most successful information campaign to date"—the Islamic State rose to international prominence in 2014 when it captured Raqqa in Syria and began a campaign that saw it take over Mosul and Tikrit in northern Iraq before announcing the establishment of a caliphate.

As a convenient justification for reengaging the American military in Iraq and as another excuse for military intervention in Syria, it was only later that the truth began to emerge: not only had the US [armed](#) and [trained](#) these very ISIS fighters that they were now engaged in mortal struggle with and not only had the US' own Defense Intelligence Agency [precisely predicted](#) the rise of an Islamic State in this area of Syria and Iraq two years before it happened, but US-led forces repeatedly stood down as ISIS convoys moved unimpeded, [allowing them to take Ramadi](#) in 2015 and [allowing a convoy of stranded ISIS fighters to return home](#) in 2017.

The career of the group's new leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, followed the now-familiar terror bogeyman pattern. Like his predecessor Zarqawi, Baghdadi was pronounced dead, alive, arrested, dead and alive again so often that news of his actions quickly descended into farce. [Detained by US forces](#) at Camp Bucca in Iraq in 2004, he was reportedly [arrested again in March 2007](#) and [killed in May of that year](#) before being [arrested yet again in 2009](#) and [killed yet again in 2010](#), at which point even *The Times* was [forced to concede](#), "The arrest or death of Mr. Baghdadi, the insurgent fighter, has been reported so many times that it has become a macabre joke."

But he was not done yet.

He was reported to have [died in an Israeli hospital](#) in April of 2015, then [killed in an airstrike](#) in October 2015 and [killed again by the Russians](#) in June 2017 before the Syrian Observatory For Human Rights released a statement insisting he "[Really Is Dead This Time](#)" in July 2017. Yet still he continued to reappear, [reliably resurrected](#) in the [headlines](#) of the [establishment press](#) to [terrorize the public](#) as needed until the [final report](#) of his death in 2019.

But perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the announcement of this, the final death of this remarkably resilient terror mastermind, carefully staged to bring to mind Obama's dramatic announcement of the death of Osama bin Laden and to rally the country around the flag once again . . .

DONALD TRUMP: Last night the United States brought the world's number one terrorist leader to justice. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is dead.

SOURCE: [President Trump Delivers Remarks](#)

. . . is that few in the public seemed even to notice that it had taken place.

And, in 2022, when Biden took his turn as the conquering hero, announcing the death of Ayman Al-Zawahiri:

BIDEN: My fellow Americans, on Saturday, at my direction, the United States successfully concluded an air strike in Kabul, Afghanistan, that killed the Emir of Al Qaeda, Ayman Zawahiri.

SOURCE: [Biden Announces Death Of Al Qaeda Leader Ayman Al-Zawahri](#)

. . . again it was greeted by a collective shrug. Few in the public even knew Zawahiri's name, let alone gave him much thought.

For a world that had just lived through two decades of near daily assurances that Al Qaeda was so existential a threat to human civilization that it justified a worldwide, never-ending War on Terror of unlimited scope, this was nothing short of remarkable. The War of Terror, it seemed, might end not with a bang but a whimper.

For the families of Zemari Ahmadi and all the millions whose blood was spilled in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, and all the other lands that have been torn apart by the senseless carnage of the past two decades, the growing apathy of the American public to the terror war narrative may come as cold comfort. But to those who have spent decades living under the shadow of the ever-present terror fearmongering, cynically wielded by politicians and governments to keep their populations cowering under the weight of colour-coded terror threats, the rejection of the terror war narrative is undeniably a turning point.

But, even if the public, having snapped out of the Al Qaeda delusion, is content to move on with their lives and to prepare to live in a post-terror world, the terror warriors have other plans.

What many in the public have failed to realize is that the War of Terror was never really about Osama bin Laden. It was never really about Al Qaeda. It wasn't about radical Muslims. At base, it wasn't even about geopolitical goals or reshaping the map of the Middle East.

It was about us.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: The Obama Administration's internal legal justification for assassinating US citizens without charge has been revealed for the first time.

SOURCE: [Kill List Exposed: Leaked Obama Memo Shows Assassination of U.S. Citizens "Has No Geographic Limit"](#)

RAND PAUL: I don't know. If the president's going to kill these people, he needs to let them know. Some of the people [who] might be terrorists are people who are missing fingers. Some people have stains on their clothing. Some people have changed the color of their hair.

SOURCE: [Senator Rand Paul exposes scary definition of 'possible terrorist'](#)

CHRIS CUOMO: This was no mere protest gone awry. It was what they used to care about on the right, the worst kind of planned violence: terrorism.

SOURCE: [CNN March 2, 2021 6:00pm-7:00pm PST](#)

DONALD TRUMP: These are not acts of peaceful protest, but really domestic terror.

SOURCE: [BBC News | September 2, 2020 3:00am-3:31am BST](#)

ELAINE QIUJANO: The Assistant Director of the FBI's Counterterrorism Division told Congress that the Bureau currently has 850 open domestic terror cases. Half of those are anti-government or anti-authority extremists.

SOURCE: [FBI investigating 850 domestic terror cases](#)

REP. BOEBERT: And this was what DHS decided to put out in a bulletin that now, if you have COVID misinformation that they classify misinformation, you are a domestic terrorist.

SOURCE: ['Covid Misinformation Is Now Domestic Terrorism': Says Congresswoman Boebert Citing A DHS Bulletin](#)

CHRYSTIA FREELAND: First, we are broadening the scope of Canada's anti-money laundering and terrorist financing rules so that they cover crowdfunding platforms and the payment service providers they use.

SOURCE: [Trudeau invokes Emergencies Act for first time ever in response to protests](#)

BUSH: There is little cultural overlap between violent extremists abroad and violent extremists at home. But in their disdain for pluralism, in their disregard for human life, in their determination to defile national symbols, they are children of the same foul spirit, and it is our continuing duty to confront them.

SOURCE: [Bush calls out domestic terror threat at 9/11 ceremony](#)

There, just below the surface of the War on Terror story that was sold to the public—the story of radical, freedom-hating Muslims and cowardly terror attacks and crusading Presidents flanked by their valiant Navy SEALs—is another story. As if written in invisible ink between the lines of the history of Al Qaeda is the story of the PATRIOT Act and the Department of Homeland Security, of the TSA and biometric screening and domestic terror watch lists. It is the story of the creation of an entire infrastructure of legal measures and emergency powers that have quietly transformed the face of the so-called free world.

The terror myth has always served primarily as a tool of domestic control. It is a blank check for every government to enact whatever controls it desires over its population in the name of "security." And the public, convinced of the need for that security by the terror war myth itself, clamours for more government controls. The problem feeds upon itself.

There is only one way to break out of such a vicious circle. The underlying premise of the entire terror war has to be called out for what it is: a lie.

In the end, perhaps this is how the War of Terror *really* ends. Not with the toppling of the Taliban or a "Mission Accomplished" photo op on the deck of an aircraft carrier or the announcement of the death of the arch terror

mastermind or even by presidential declaration. Not by these or any of the other illusory endpoints that the terror warriors dangle in front of the public from time to time only to snatch away when grasped at.

No. The War of Terror ends when the public, having learnt the secret history of Al Qaeda, decide to consign the *real* terror threat, the *myth* of Al Qaeda, to the dustbin of history.

FALSE FLAGS: THE SECRET HISTORY OF AL QAEDA

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transcript and sources: CORBETREPORT.COM/ALQAEDA

Dedicated to all those who lost their lives in the war of terror and all those who have sought to expose the truth about that war